Philip Gibbs.

Margaret M. Grant
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THE NOVELS OF
PHILIP GIBBS
UNIFORM EDITION

VENETIAN LOVERS
AND OTHER STORIES

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By
PHILIP GIBBS

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VENETIAN LOVERS

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When my friend Percival Goring said good-bye to me, and to Paula Ostuni, on the steps outside the Hôtel Dandolo at Venice before jumping into his gondola, I saw that the boy was absurdly overcome by emotion. It was not grief at parting with me, needless to say, though I was his friend. He just shook my hand in his airy Oxford way, and said, "So-long, old man," and then he turned to the girl, blushing up to the roots of his hair, and took her hand—a pretty hand, as I had often noticed, because one's eyes were drawn to it by the clustered diamonds of her rings—and raised it to his lips, and said in Italian, "*A rivederla, Madonna.*"

Those words were commonplace enough, a formal *au revoir*, but they were spoken with an immense, boyish tenderness and infinite regret for this parting which I had arranged by a kind of treachery—he would have thought it that had he known—so that he should be taken away from this girl, the wife of Count Ostuni, who was also my friend.

"I hope to see you soon again," she answered in English, and then laughed a little as though at some secret joke. I think that laughter hurt him, and I saw by the look in his eyes that he was surprised because she showed no touch of grief at his going. I was glad of it, and thought, "The minx is not so bad as I supposed. Perhaps she did not lead him on so fast as I imagined."

"Somewhere and soon I'll find you again," said the boy. "As soon as my mother is better——"

He did not know that I had written to his mother, saying, "Make some reason why Percival should go home quickly. I am afraid of trouble here." She had given the reason of ill-health, which was true enough;

dear lady, because she was always ailing. She had been very quick to take my hint, and her telegram had come to this Venetian hotel in less than two days after the receipt of my message, which was fast as Italian wires were working then.

"*Pronto!*" said the gondolier, and with a stroke of his long oar sent his boat gliding out of the narrow canal by the side of our hotel to the broad, sunlit water of the Grand Canal, where many gondolas lay in waiting by the landing-stage, with their slim black bodies and steel prows shimmering in the glare of light. The Italian girl and I, standing above the wet steps in the shadowy coolness of our waterway below the high blank walls of two grey old palaces—in the sixteenth century our hotel had been one of the most splendid palaces of this republic on the sea—watched Goring's boat shoot out into the sunlight, saw how the white jacket of the gondolier caught the first splash of that noonday glare, and how Goring's panama hat was touched by it before he took it off and waved.

The Countess Ostuni, reckless of hotel porters, hotel guests and of me, put the tips of her fingers to her lips and blew kisses with them to that boy in the boat, that English boy on whom I had promised his mother to keep an eye. He saw her message with those white finger-tips, and I think he was tempted instantly to come back. I saw him rise from his seat and put his hand on the gondolier's arm with an eager, imperative gesture. The gondola swung round a little, but then, after a kind of hesitation, answered another stroke of the blade, and disappeared from our view round the corner of the Grand Canal.

The Italian girl turned to me full-faced, and I saw that her eyes were wet with tears, which she did not try to hide. But she was in no melting mood. She spoke to me with a harshness of tone which was startling, because often I had admired the sweetness and music of her voice.

"You are glad he is gone! You are much relieved in your stupid, suspicious mind! You are too old, perhaps, to understand a youthful friendship."

"Not very old, Countess," I said, "but old enough

to know that between an emotional boy and a young married woman friendship sometimes leads to tragedy."

She laughed, with a quick, pretty hunch of the shoulders, graceful and neat in all her movements, whatever she did.

"You are very English!"

"And you," I answered, "very Italian!"

"Italian women have quick wits. I saw quickly that you disliked me very much. That amused me! I shall be more amused when Percival comes back and you are frightened again."

"He is going straight through to England," I told her, and at those words she made a funny face at me—she was a merry beauty, I must admit—and said in a mysterious and teasing way:

"I wonder! You know your old proverb, 'There's many a cup 'twixt lip and——' How does it go?"

"Not quite like that," I laughed. "But in half an hour young Goring will be in the train to Paris."

I was wrong. In half an hour young Goring was back again at the hotel. I was leaning out of my bedroom window on the first floor of the Hôtel Dandolo, listening to the band on the American battleship lying out there in the Grand Canal, and watching the coming and going of gondolas from the landing-stage and the ceaseless procession along the quayside of Venetian girls in their long black shawls, barefooted boys, dandy Italian officers, American sailor boys, monks and nuns, merchants and labourers, beggars and cripples, passing across the little stone bridge whose old stones have been hollowed by the footsteps of three hundred years of Venetian life. I was not thinking of that human picture below me—though I did, as a matter of fact, notice a kind of sullen look on some of the faces of the Italian workmen who passed, and the hostile, deliberate way in which a huge fellow spat on the stones as he passed the hotel. I was thinking of young Goring, with an immense sense of relief that he had gone.

During the last three weeks he had been far too much with Paula Ostuni. I had introduced them in the tea-lounge, that wonderful room downstairs, with its marble pillars and painted walls and star-spangled ceiling and

portraits of doges, cardinals and princes who once had moved across these polished boards. They had talked two minutes together, and then young Goring had said: "It's a pity to waste the music! Won't you dance?" She had given him her arms, and I had watched them making their way rhythmically through the little crowd of dancers who, between four and six, make a cosmopolitan throng in this room beyond the tea-tables. A strange crowd of Italian profiteers and their women, Italian actresses and dancing-girls, officers of the Bersaglieri and Carabini, with English tourists, abashed sometimes by the startling frocks of the Italian ladies, American naval officers, out for fun, and a sprinkling of Greeks and Israelites, and Germans, waiting at Venice a few days before going eastwards or westwards.

Young Goring and the Countess Ostuni were certainly the prettiest couple there. The boy was as good a type as any that comes from an English public school, fine and tall and clean in line—youth as a sculptor sees it in his mind's eye. The girl was a match for him, but utterly un-English with her black hair and eyes, and ripe lips, and full, white throat. Certainly she was beautiful and enticing. She had laughing, rather cat-like eyes, and a wonderful grace of body which does not belong, as a rule, to English girls. I remember that afternoon she wore a dress of gold-embroidered silk, with an old-gold fringe, which was the fashion at that time—the fringe, I mean. It was very low at the neck and not, I must admit, very low below the knee, but she was a slim and girlish creature who looked well in such a frock.

Goring and she danced together then for the first time, and many times afterwards, as though they had been divinely matched. It was a pleasure to watch them, a perfect melody of rhythmic movement. A pleasure, though even at that first time I was startled by some look on the boy's face, as though he had been caught up into the seventh heaven. Afterwards, when other people noticed how often they danced together, and how utterly oblivious to all but their own words and looks they were, I was worried. More worried when they went out at night for long gondola rides on

the Grand Canal, and when Goring came back with an excited look and shining eyes. Count Ostuni was in Rome then, before the resignation of his office as Minister of Commerce, after a storm of popular fury, and he only came to Venice three days before to-day, when Goring left for England.

"Thank heaven the child has gone to England!" I said aloud, and at that very minute there was a sharp knock at my door, and in "the child" came, flushed and troubled.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Why have you come back?"

"An extraordinarily foolish thing has happened," he answered in his quiet way. "Somebody has pinched my passport. I swear I had it in my pocket half an hour before I left. At the station I felt for it, and I'll be hanged if it hadn't gone! Of course they wouldn't let me on the train. Without a passport one can't move a yard these days. What's to be done?"

"Find the thief," I told him. "I know who it is."

"You know?" He was astounded at that.

"Paula Ostuni," I said quietly. "I've no doubt about it. She played the pickpocket, the little devil, so that you should miss your train."

Percival Goring glared at me angrily for a moment, and then laughed.

"What extraordinary notions you do have! If there were a murder committed in this hotel you would think Paula had a hand in it. You're infernally prejudiced against her—for some unknown reason."

"I haven't told you my reason," I answered, "but I think you guess it."

His face flushed instantly, and he went over to the window and stood there, talking, with his back to me, while he stared out to the canal and tied knots in the window-cord.

"You guess wrong. You've got an idea that I want to run away with Paula or do some fool's trick like that. As a matter of fact, that's all rot. There's a splendid friendship between us, and she's the most wonderful girl I've ever known, and I'll be as miserable as hell if I can't see her pretty often. But nothing more than that."

I followed him across the room and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Look here," I said, "I'm almost old enough to be your father, and, anyhow, I've promised your mother to keep an eye on you. That gives me the right to say things which sound like 'cheek' otherwise. What I want to say is just this: You don't know your own strength or your own weakness . . . when temptation will find the weak spot in your armour. No fellow does at your age. Some fellows learn by tragic experience. I want to save you that tragedy. That girl Paula has no more morality than a kitten. Anyhow, she's an Italian, with a different code from us. And even if she were a saint—which she isn't—she's too pretty and too passionate to be safe company for a boy like you or a man like me. My advice, old lad, is, cut and run before the fat's in the fire."

He shook my hand off his shoulder savagely.

"Rot! You belong to the older generation. You were taught to be afraid of women—that cut-and-run policy of a dirty old Puritanism which sees no innocence in friendship between men and women. We've got beyond that. We're more healthy. Paula and I could be on a desert island and be good pals—and nothing more."

What can one say to words like that? Just nothing at all. That remark about the older generation was something of a body-blow, and this boy's calm assurance of superior wisdom, due to having been born some years later in the world's history, was beyond argument, as youth is always beyond argument, and beyond warning, and always will be, according to the law of life, which makes human experience, the wisdom of the old, a million tragic lessons of the past, incapable of transmission.

"Anyhow, Paula has got your passport," I said. "You had better hurry up and get it from her or you will lose the evening train."

He denied utterly that Paula Ostuni could be capable of such a trick, knowing that his mother was ill and needed him. But I saw, or think I saw, that my definite assertion caused him some uneasiness, and that, according

to the way of youth, the thought that the girl should have "pinched" his passport, to keep him back, was not unpleasing, in spite of his anxiety about his mother. It showed her desire for his company. Poor kid! Still, as he repeated, the idea was absurd!

I am certain it was true, all the same, because of the wicked little smile the girl gave me across the boy's shoulder as they went dancing again in that room which I had come to hate in spite of its Renaissance beauty, and because Percival's passport was discovered tucked down the back of the sofa where they had been sitting before his false start for Paris. She found it "by accident," with a very natural air of surprise, and cried out with a ripple of laughter, "How careless you are, Percival!" It was found in time for him to have caught the night train, but by that time all of us in the hotel, and Paula Ostuni, knew that there would be no night train, because Venice had joined the railway strike which had been spasmodic in Italy for several weeks.

The news had been telephoned through to the hall porter from Cook's office at the corner of St. Mark's Square, and had caused consternation among the little crowd of people who were already having their luggage put into the gondolas and had already said good-bye to friends in the great hall.

An American business man said: "For the love of Mike! And they call this darned country the cradle of civilisation!"

A rich Greek family, on their way to Liverpool, stood disconsolate among their hand-baggage, and the father abused the hotel manager for not letting them know before. I noticed that two of the waiters laughed to each other, as though vastly amused by the inconvenience to people who did not give them tips, according to the new rule placarded in the rooms and in the lifts: "*Le Mance sono assolutamente vietati.*" Afterwards I saw some of these fellows whispering together.

It was Count Ostuni who gave me a more serious view of the matter than I had first taken. He touched me on the arm as I stood in the hall, and said, "I want to talk to you. Let's find a quiet corner."

We found two of the big, low leather chairs at the far

end of the room, by the high stone chimney-piece sculptured with the arms of the Dandoli. as far away as possible from the minstrels' gallery below the pointed arches where the orchestra was playing after dinner. Up there in the open galleries which looked down into this central hall were groups of people who had just dined and were sitting on the balustrades, or leaning over them, watching the scene below, and chatting to each other, and smoking cigarettes. A glow of candle-light, or, rather, of electric lamps made in the shape of candles and fastened in gilt brackets, gave a glamour to the women's hair and to their white arms andshoulders. Their diamonds twinkled with little points of light. The men's shirt-fronts gleamed white, and here and there the medals of Italian officers glinted like the women's jewels. Down below where we sat only about four couples were dancing, and among them were Paula and Percival, going round dreamily, looking into each other's eyes, whispering a word now and then.

Ostuni shifted in his chair as the orchestra started a new dance tune in American ragtime.

"So they go on fiddling while Rome burns!" he said.

He spoke with bitterness, and I could see that the man's nerves were all on edge. I studied him as he sat there smoking a cigarette through a long amber mouth-piece, his face in the shadow flung across him by one of the pillars behind which we sat, but with a ray of candle-light touching his profile. He had a strong face, on stern lines. Rather Roman, I thought, and not unlike a youthful Cæsar. Youthful, that is, compared with the bust of Julius Cæsar on a pedestal in this room, though he was a man of thirty-eight or so. That is, I reckoned, eighteen years at least older than that wife of his who passed us with her arms round Percival, to whom she said something that made the boy smile.

I did not wonder that Ostuni's nerves were on edge. He had played a difficult part in the last Italian Cabinet, and his desperate efforts to cope with the financial situation and restore Italy had failed lamentably. He was responsible for the withdrawal of the bread subsidy, which had increased the price of the loaf and caused

iots in several towns. The people had called him Baby-starver," and the Italian papers had surpassed hemselves in the violence and obscenity of their cartoons. Ie was made the scapegoat of the Government and xpelled from office when the Cabinet yielded to popular ressure and renewed the subsidy. But the people were ıot satisfied with his expulsion, and his life even had been hreatened at Rome. He had come to Venice as a place of safety.

"This strike," he said, "may be the beginning of the evolution which I'm afraid is bound to come. Italy cannot stand a continuance of these conflicts. We are already a bankrupt people. We can only save ourselves rom absolute disaster, from actual starvation, by an ntensity of work and production. Yet these poor fools efuse to work, and think that by demanding more wages and less taxes they can better their conditions. Look at Venice! For three weeks not a single ship has been unloaded. The steamship lines are already liverting their vessels to other ports like Marseilles. Now this railway strike cuts us off from the other cities of Italy and every city from its neighbour. Venice is already short of food, with only three days' stock. In a week, in less than that, there will be a famine. And anarchy, as sure as fate."

"Pretty serious," I assented.

Paula and Percival came and sat next to us, both lighting cigarettes.

Ostuni patted his wife's hand.

"You never tire of dancing, *carissima*. I'm glad you have a good partner, though I disapprove of too much gaiety, with our poor Italy in such a desperate state."

He smiled over at Percival in the friendliest way, and I saw the boy's hand tremble a little as he lit another match for Paula. A faint colour crept beneath his fair skin.

"I must find a partner, somehow," said Paula, "with a husband like an old bear, and a sulky one! You are always worrying about the state of Italy and the poverty of the people. I find that so dull. So dull! I want to enjoy youth and get all there is to the beauty of life. The people—bah! They are a dirty lot."

She spoke pettishly, like a spoilt child, and Percival laughed. But I saw a shadow cross Ostuni's face.

"Do not speak of the people like that, *carissima*," he said gently. "In the war they were heroic. They have suffered terribly, and now have no reward for all their sacrifice. We who escaped the greater suffering must dedicate our lives to the people, and help them by every means."

"I hate them," said Paula, puffing out a long wreath of smoke. "I hate dirt, and poverty, and misery. Most of it, anyhow, is their own fault. You say so yourself. Why don't they work, instead of abusing people like ourselves?"

Ostuni looked round the room, into which more people had come from the galleries upstairs.

"There is much to abuse here," he said. "These profiteers, who have gorged themselves fat like vultures on the business of war, on the dead bodies of youth —these shameless people!"

He struck his hand a sharp blow on the arm of his chair, in a kind of passion.

Paula laughed in her silvery way.

"They obey the law of life, my husband. Some gain, some lose. But do not let us talk politics. I want you to give me that rope of pearls which we saw in the window at the corner of St. Mark's Square. It is a wonderful bargain, and foolishly cheap."

"I told you no, *carissima*," said Ostuni gently. "We are too poor. Thank God, anyhow, I have made no money out of this war, though they call me also, in their ignorance, a 'blood-sucker.' What do you want with more jewels? Even those diamonds hurt my eyes, because I think of the starving people. And, anyhow, it is dangerous to wear them where the people may see. Look, there are eyes upon you now. Not friendly eyes."

He turned his head slightly towards the window by the side of us. Then, as often before, faces were pressed against the window-panes and eyes were staring into this great room with its lights and its white-armed women and its look of luxury. I thought then, though I may have been mistaken, that as Ostuni turned his head his name was spoken by someone in the street

outside, by a voice belonging to one of those staring faces pressed hard against the window-panes.

"Impertinent wretches!" said Paula, turning her back on the window and those watchers. She caught hold of her husband's hand as it lay on his knee, and pleaded with him in a childish way.

"Buy me those pearls, Luigi! I will give you no peace until you do."

"No, no," said Ostuni. "Is not my love worth more than a foolish trinket?" He took up her hand and kissed it, and would have kissed it again if she had not dragged it away in a passion.

"You are old and mean!" she said in a low voice. "You do not care for me now. Let us dance again, *ragazzo bellissimo*."

Those last words were to Percival, who had been distressed by the conversation that had gone on, and now rose with a look of relief, though shyly because of Ostuni.

They danced away from us and then disappeared behind a pillar.

"She is still a child," said Ostuni. "She does not understand. I want only her happiness, and yet because of my career and duty I have left her much alone. I wish she would be less intolerant of the poor people. She thinks I am a foolish sentimentalist. It is the intolerance of youth and happiness."

I was tempted to lean forward to him and say, "Take your wife away if you want to keep her. Do not leave her too much alone again. It is very dangerous for you and for her."

I did not yield to that temptation, because something happened to disturb all conversation. The orchestra was playing that piece called "Destiny," which has a sound lighter than its name, and there was the swish of silk shoes on polished boards and light ripples of laughter from girls talking to their men at little tables on the edge of the dancing place. Suddenly into the midst of these pleasant sounds came a startling crash, very close to where I sat, followed by a tinkle of broken glass. Someone from outside had hurled a stone straight through the window. It fell close to Ostuni and broke

one of the electric candle-lamps before it fell. There was a sensation in the room, though it took the form of silence instead of noise. Everybody sprang up, and then stood still, and the dancers stayed motionless for a few seconds.

From the street came a gust of harsh laughter, and then a shout in one man's voice:

"Ostuni! *Bandito! Porco! Scelerato! A morte!*"

Three times the name of Ostuni was shouted out, followed by foul words. Then, as one could hear, the crowd outside was scattered by the sharp report of a rifle-shot or pistol-shot, and after that there was silence in the street as well as in the room.

Ostuni was standing rather rigid and very pale.

The first words he said were spoken to me.

"The trouble is beginning. . . . Why do they hate *me* most of all? I have done my best for them."

Ostuni was quite right when he said it was the beginning of trouble. Looking back now, I see that he had been right about other things, especially the danger of flaunting wealth so openly in the face of the multitude made bitter by the soaring price of foodstuffs and all necessities of life, while Venice was infested with rich people who had made great profits out of a world conflict. It was bitter irony which made the people fasten on his name, and desire his blood, as the worst enemy of their class and interests.

Our hotel, which had seemed securely aloof from all this trouble until that stone came crashing through the window, did not escape from internal disorder and the spirit of this conflict. It came home to us closely before another day had passed, and afterwards more seriously. All the waiters and hotel servants, including the cooks and the scullions, went on strike before the next day's dinner. We were all sitting at table, waiting for the soup—the same women in their filmy frocks, the same dandified Italians and rich Greeks and English tourists—when the hotel manager, who called himself a Swiss, and was, I think, an Austrian, announced the dread news to hungry people. He spoke in Italian, French and English, and made the same little speech in each tongue.

"Ladies and gentlemen, owing to the strike of all our servants, with the exception of the female staff and a few others, I regret that it is impossible to serve dinner this evening."

That made a greater sensation than the crashing of the stone through the window downstairs. To be denied food seems a worse calamity to prosperous people than to be in physical danger of a more violent kind. There was an uproar of voices, expostulations, lamentations.

"Disgraceful!" said an English lady, the wife of a clergyman. "Surely the police ought to prevent such a thing!"

One of the waiters came into the room. He was one of those I had seen whispering in the hall the day before, a sinister, wild-eyed fellow. He had changed from his waiter's clothes into an ordinary civilian suit, and wore a red scarf round his neck. He stood by the buffet from which the waiters used to serve, and laughed in a harsh voice.

"Our turn has come!" he said. "And yours! This is more than a strike. It is revolution. It is a fight between the people and the fat pigs who have betrayed them. You are the fat pigs, the profiteers, the robbers of the people's wealth. Now you may go hungry. You will know what it means to the poor who starved while you gorged. Those plump arms of your over-fed women will shrink a little. Take care those white necks are not tied round with rope and hung from the balconies of Venice. . . . And you, Luigi Ostuni, blood-sucker and baby-starver"—he stretched out his arm towards my friend, who was sitting facing me at table, with Percival and Paula on each side of us—"be very careful not to show yourself to the people. They are asking for you. They want small pieces of you to carry as souvenirs."

He gave again that harsh, insolent laugh, and went from the room just as several Italian gentlemen rose from their chairs with intent to thrash him or hurl him out. One of them held a table-knife like a dagger. Something in his eyes told me that he would have struck that waiter through the throat if he had uttered another insult.

But passion and indignation did not produce a dinner.

Some of us went foraging in the kitchen, and brought up meats and pies which were good enough for a picnic meal. It restored good humour to some of the visitors, and Paula especially thought it all a good joke as she and Percival shared the wing of a fowl. She had pluck, I thought, and was not cowed by those threats against her husband, who sat pale and silent, and did not eat the food I handed to him.

Once he made a remark to me in a low voice.

"I believe that fellow is right. This is more than a strike. It is revolution."

I made allowance for his pessimism, and saw no sign of real revolution next day in Venice, but only the anxiety of shopkeepers and a rather sullen attitude among small groups of men and women who stood talking in St. Mark's Square and on the Rialto, where the crowds were thicker below the old bridge where once Shylock called for his ducats and his daughter and Antonio heard the news of doom.

The weather was hot again, and the Grand Canal seemed like molten gold beneath its glare, and every gondola, every painted mooring-pole, and the American battleship, was perfectly mirrored there on the smooth, shining water. On the other side the Church of Santa Maria della Salute and the island of San Giorgio were dazzling in this sunlight beneath a sky of intense, cloudless blue. The pigeons preened themselves in St. Mark's Square. The figures on the old clock above the gateway struck the hours lazily; beggars lay sleeping during the afternoon siesta on the marble seats by the Doge's palace. No sign of revolution.

But that evening before dusk ugly things began to happen. From all the narrow, winding streets—around the *fondamenta di* San Zaccaria, the Calle Lunga, the Campo di Santa Maria Formosa—there came crowds of men and women of the poorest classes and groups of boys and girls out for mischief. They were shouting and singing and shrieking out revolutionary cries. From what I heard afterwards, they started attacking the provision and clothes-shops down the Merceria under the clock tower; but when I met them they had surged into St. Mark's Square, and were looting some of the rich

shops, especially jewellers' shops, which cater for the tourists of the world. The Italian police had disappeared and at that time no soldiers had come on the scene.

As a stranger and a prudent man, with a long experience of mobs and riots, I had decided to beat a retreat before I became involved, when I saw to my alarm and astonishment that Percival and Paula were in the midst of a menacing crowd outside one of these jewellers' shops. Young Goring had already been hit by a bit of broken glass—the windows had been smashed to splinters—and there was a nasty gash down his cheek, bleeding profusely. He was very pale, and held Paula by one arm while he tried to elbow his way out of the crowd about him. The girl was passionately angry. I think her anger had entirely destroyed all sense of fear. She called the crowd dogs and pigs, and bade them get out of her way and let her pass. I noticed even then, and I think it queer that at such a moment I should have seen this detail, that she wore a rope of pearls about her neck. Percival Goring had bought her the treasure which she had been refused by her husband, and I think it was the sight of those pearls which inflamed the anger of the mob as much as her angry words.

It was the women who called her the worst names—coarse names from the vocabulary of Boccaccio, untranslatable—and I think she understood the meaning of them, for a wave of colour swept into her face, but she held her head high, proudly, with a most arrogant and scornful look. Whether they would have laid hands on her and young Goring I am not sure. I believe they were in great danger, but at that moment a small body of Carabini swung into the square, and at a word of command which rang out the crowd fell away a little from the boy and girl. I joined them and spoke anxiously.

"Don't run, but walk fast, but if they follow you get into the cathedral."

"I am not afraid," said Paula Ostuni. "They are nothing but a dirty rabble."

"I'm afraid," said Percival, "for your own sake, Paula. Walk faster, for God's sake!"

The crowd did not follow. We were just out of the

square when we heard the firing of the volley that, as we knew afterwards, killed several men and women and led to rioting and fighting in a night of terror.

Paula stopped just outside our hotel and dabbed Percival's cheeks with a lace handkerchief.

"You were my knight," she said. "I will kiss the blood that flowed for me."

She put the handkerchief to her lips and, in her emotional Italian way, kissed the red stains on it.

"I'd have spilt more blood than that scratch before they hurt you!" said the boy. "They were like wild beasts."

"Listen!" said Paula. "Some of them are dying because of their beastliness."

Some more shots rang out in St. Mark's Square, and I hated to hear the sound of them, and hated to see the smile on that girl's face.

"They are getting what they deserve," she said. "The dogs!"

I think even Percival was startled by her joy in the sound of those shots, which he knew meant death.

"Poor wretches!" he said.

But he was very tender to Paula when, for a minute, nearly fainting in spite of her disdain of danger at the time, she sat back in one of the low chairs in the tea-room of our hotel. He went down into the kitchen, a cheerless place now, with only a few old women in attendance, and made some tea and brought it up. By this time Paula had recovered and was merry again, laughing at her adventure, and fingering her pearls like a child playing with a new toy.

"They were cheap, you say?" I asked her.

And she said: "Wonderfully cheap. Only forty-five thousand lire!"

Five hundred pounds in English money. Yes, cheap for a rope of pearls, and not ruinous to young Goring, heir to Lancashire cotton mills, but a folly and a shame at a time of wretchedness in a bankrupt country.

I held my tongue about that. What was the good of protesting to this girl, who was utterly irresponsible, entirely callous of her people's misery, or to Percival, who was bewitched by her beauty?

Yet I went to the boy's room that night determined to give him a more serious warning, to appeal to that sense of honour in him which for a while seemed destroyed by love-sickness. I had found it impossible to sleep. Ugly things were happening in Venice. It was quite quiet along the Riva degli Schiavoni, the quayside below my windows. Some American bluejackets stood on guard by the Vaporetto landing-stage, and I saw the gleam of their bayonets and heard them talking in low voices. But from the direction of St. Mark's Square and the narrow *calle* behind came the sound of rioting. I could hear distant shouting and now and then screams of women. There was a fire burning somewhere, and its ruddy glare touched the pale-blue sky of this Venetian night. From another quarter came the sound of rifle-shots, and I heard quite distinctly the rat-tat-tat of machine-gun fire. Once a woman came running past the landing-stage, and cried out in anguish as she ran:

"*O Jesu! . . . O Maria, Madre di Cristo!*"

The American bluejackets barred her way, and for some time she stayed there, making shrill lamentations.

No, it was impossible to sleep, and I put on my dressing-gown and went down the corridor to Percival Goring's room. The door was ajar, and he had left his light burning. I called to him twice, and, getting no answer, went in the room and found it was empty. He had not been to bed yet, and none of his clothes were lying about. A sense of uneasiness took hold of me, and after hesitating in the room a few moments I went out again and down the great staircase to the gallery overlooking the hall. Perhaps young Goring was asleep or smoking in one of the big chairs down there. It was the kind of thing he would do in his present state of mind. Only one light was burning in that great cavernous space below the arches. It was an electric lamp on one of the small tables by the sculptured fireplace, and it made a round pool of light on the polished boards and reached out in the room to gilded brackets and marble pillars and Venetian mirrors which faintly sparkled through the surrounding darkness. It also illuminated two figures sitting close in one of the big leather chairs. They were Paula Ostuni and Percival. I was certain it was the

Italian girl because her face was turned to the lamplight above a vague shimmer of blue silk which was her dressing-gown. Of Percival I could see nothing except a black form and a streak of white where the light caught the edge of his shirt-front. But I heard his voice.

"What can we do?" he said. "We can't go on like this now that we know we love each other. Oh, Paula, I thought we could just be pals!"

There was a note of anguish in his voice.

Paula answered him with that soft Italian purr of hers which could sometimes change to harshness, as I had heard.

"Foolish child! Are you afraid of love, then? I want you—all of me wants all of you—and you want me. It is very simple. It is just life. We will go away together with our love. *Bellissimo!*"

"I'm sorry we found out," said Percival. "I thought it could just be friendship."

"Between you and me it was love—from the first," answered Paula, and I think she had her arms about him then. "It was your boyhood, your clean English look, which caught hold of me. That is my boy, I said. . . . Little boy of mine, you are afraid because my love is so like a flame which scorches you. Do not be afraid of its burning!"

"It's a sweet fire," said Percival, "but, oh, my dear, I feel ashamed when I think I shall drag you into dishonour. Have you thought of that? What will Ostuni say, and all the world?"

"Love is above honour," said Paula. "It is above law. What do I care about the world, or anything, with you as my little lover, my big little English boy?"

I was an eavesdropper there in that dark gallery, but it was only after those few moments that I was conscious of shame in listening to words not meant for me. Before then I had been held by a kind of spell, fascinated by that revelation of two souls confessing a love which one of them knew was sinful so that he was agonised. A great anger took hold of me against the girl, that cat-like creature who was weaving her witchery round this English boy, and I had a mind to go straight down to her with violent words and all the indignation which

stirred me. And then suddenly I had a sense of pity for them both, for these two children of life, so young, so mastered by the passion of their youth. How could one help them out of this trap into which the old devil had lured them both? I turned to go out of the dark archway, but drew back again suddenly. Another figure passed down the corridor and looked over the balustrade. It was Ostuni's voice which called out quietly:

"Are you there, *carissima*?"

I heard the noise of a swift, rustling movement in the hall below. Paula was standing up alone by the shaded lamp. Percival had drawn back into the darkness and was invisible.

"Is that you, Luigi?" she answered, and her voice shook a little.

"Yes," he said. "I cannot sleep. There is bad work in Venice to-night. Will you not come up to your room? I was anxious when I looked in and saw that you had gone."

"I was restless," she answered again. "And it is cooler down here."

"I will come down to you," said Ostuni.

She did not answer him, and again I heard the sound of a quick movement down below. Ostuni went down the corridor—I saw his dark figure at the head of the stairs—and a moment later young Goring stood face to face with me. He had come up the other stairway, very swiftly and silently, and I saw the whiteness of his face.

I grasped him by the wrist and whispered to him, and I think my sudden apparition gave him a great shock.

"Fool!" I said. "And worse than fool if you go on like this."

He asked me what the devil I meant, and I told him plainly as we stood outside his door.

"That girl is luring you to dishonour. You are up to the neck in it now. What about your mother who is lying ill, praying for you? Is this the time for love-making with Ostuni's wife?"

I think that reminder of his mother hit him hard. Too hard, I think now, for it was pretty cruel of me.

"Hell!" he said. "I ought to have caught that train. Now it's too late, anyhow."

He put his hand up to his head, and I could see that he was almost crying.

I turned up the light in his room, and when he came in shut the door after him.

"Cut and run," I said. "It's the best plan. I'll help you all I know. If there are no trains, ride. You can get a horse. If there are no horses, walk. I'll come with you."

"Too late!" he groaned. "Paula and I have found out we love one another. We're fairly in the cart!"

For two hours that night I sat with him, arguing, pleading, protesting, and it was all useless and ended in a quarrel when I said that Paula Ostuni was an immoral little slut who ought to get a whipping from her husband.

"Clear out of my room," he said, "or I'll throw you out."

The boy was infatuated, though conscience-stricken, torn between loyalty to that mother of his who lay ill, and for all he knew dying, and to that Italian girl who had aroused the first passion of his heart so that he was Romeo to her Juliet and on fire with love. I saw there was only once chance of saving him from immediate shipwreck of honour, and of happiness, too, after passion should be spent—one day he would find out the hardness of the spirit behind that pretty face—and that was by the ending of the strike, so that he could have no excuse for staying away from the mother who called for him. I hoped to God there would be a train from Venice in the morning.

The truth was that Venice in the morning had a sinister look, and so far from showing any sign of peace, was preparing for renewed conflict. A score of people had been killed in the night and large numbers wounded. Some of the soldiers had gone over to the mob, or had, at least, refused to fire on them, and the others were outnumbered and cowed by the ferocity of the strikers and the crowds of looters. Many of the little courts and alleys of Venice were barricaded; all the shops were shut and boarded, if they had not been already wrecked;

and in St. Mark's Square there were great gatherings of revolutionary spirits addressed by violent orators, among whom I recognised the waiter at the Hôtel Dandolo who had made a scene in the dining-room by outrageous and menacing words.

I listened to him on the outskirts of the crowd, and heard the name of Ostuni repeated many times and greeted each time with hootings and jeers.

"The fellow is obsessed with hatred of Ostuni," I thought, and then pressed nearer to catch the gist his speech.

"Here in Venice," he shouted, "we have our worst enemy. The man who tried to starve our women and children by putting up the price of the loaf so that he and his fellow-robbers might grow fatter on the profits of dear bread. What is the punishment for a crime like that?"

"Death!" cried many voices in the crowd.

"In the old days of Venice," shouted this orator of the mob, "the Council of the Five Hundred had merry ways with poor devils who displeased them, people like you and me who dared to voice their grievances. In that prison there across the Bridge of Sighs they tortured them in dark dungeons and then chopped off their heads and dropped them into the canal below. We will not torture Ostuni, but if we are Venetians, and not traitors, we will drag him out of that hotel where he dances with his painted women—oh, I know them and their insolence—and trample him to death beneath our feet. Who will be the first to fetch him? I will show you where he hides."

There was hoarse laughter and a great shout in which I heard the old note of cruelty when men desire the blood of other men. Some people moved away as though they would go there and then to fetch Ostuni, but the orator was not yet through with his speech, and held up an arresting hand.

I walked quickly back to the Hôtel Dandolo. That crowd meant ugly business regarding Count Ostuni. It was not merely froth of mob fury. . . .

He was sitting with Paula and Percival in the very place where these two had been that night, and I could

see that he had no suspicion of the boy or of that girl, his wife.

Before those two I told him what I had heard, and begged him to leave the hotel at once and take shelter in some other house.

"What house?" he asked quietly, without a sign of fear, but without false heroics. "They would find me wherever I go."

"Go to the Cardinal," I said. "They respect him for his courage and goodness. They will not lay a finger on him, nor on anyone whom he shelters. . . ."

"It's a good idea," said Percival eagerly.

"It's a ridiculous idea!" said Paula. "If I were a man bearing the name of Ostuni I should be ashamed to hide from a crowd of ruffians."

She laughed in a shrill, angry way, and said: "You will not go, Luigi?"

"It might be prudent," said Ostuni gravely. "One man against a mob has little chance. I do not mind for myself, but for your sake I want to live a little longer."

He spoke those last words with a smile and tenderly putting his hands on hers.

She drew her hand away impatiently, and jerked her head back.

"I like men with physical courage," she said.

I could see a little colour creep beneath the skin of Ostuni's rather pale face, and Percival looked horribly uncomfortable.

"I am no coward," said Ostuni. "I think I have proved that. I will stay here if you think like that."

Percival spoke in a low voice.

"The contessa spoke a little thoughtlessly, perhaps. I have no right to an opinion in this matter, but I cannot help thinking that it would be risky for you to stay here, sir."

"Oh, I will stay," answered Ostuni carelessly.

"They won't come, anyhow!" said Paula.

But they came as soon as dusk had fallen. We heard the noise of the approaching crowd along the Riva degli Schiavoni as we sat in the dining-room upstairs, still eking out the scanty stores left in the kitchens. They were shouting outside the hotel, and above the growling

murmur of the men's bass voices there sounded the shrill clamour of women.

"They have come for me," said Ostuni calmly.

Percival Goring glanced at Paula with an expression of extreme distress. I, too, looked at her, and saw a strange glitter in her eyes, and she seemed to me rather witchlike. Her lips, so red and ripe as a rule, had lost their colour, and she paled beneath the touch of rouge on her cheeks.

"They will make a noise," she said. "Perhaps break a few more windows!"

What happened was the breaking of the doors downstairs which had been shut against them by the manager, that Austrian, as I think he was. Percival and I had gone down from the dining-room to the hall with an idea of seeing more close what was happening, so that we might warn Ostuni of any instant peril. Other people staying in the hotel were there too, standing in groups, with frightened looks. The women were in their evening frocks, in spite of a picnic meal, and two or three Italian officers among them were gesticulating in an excited way. The English clergyman's wife, a rather sour-faced lady, showed her contempt for all foreigners, and for this mob, by knitting her usual sock as she sat in a straight-backed chair.

Paula came down the great staircase, slowly dangling her rope of pearls, with a queer smile about her lips.

Ostuni himself was leaning over the balustrade of the lowest gallery, smoking a cigarette through his long amber mouthpiece.

It was then that the door was burst open with a crash and a splintering of glass and wood. The first man through was the fellow who had been a waiter here, wild-eyed, with disordered hair, and the red tie round his neck with loose ends. A score of his fellow-rioters surged after him, and a great mob pressed behind them, but could not get through the door because of these others.

"Ostuni!" shouted several voices. "We have come for Ostuni!"

They called him frightful names, to mark time, I think, while their eyes roved about the little groups of

women in evening clothes, and took stock of the men who might resist them, and measured the amount of loot which might tempt them to other deeds when they had done with the man they hated most.

It was Percival Goring who stood in their way. He stood very straight and rigid, as I had seen him once in a steel hat beneath a trench parapet, when shells were bursting very close to us. In his clear, boyish voice, and in good Italian, he spoke to the mob, who were silent when he raised his hand and began to speak, so that one heard only their panting breath.

"The Count Ostuni is not here," he said. "He is dining in another house in Venice, somewhere along the Grand Canal. You waste your time in staying here, if that is the man you want."

"You lie!" said the ex-waiter savagely. "We have kept watch on this place. Ostuni came in this afternoon, and has not stirred out since."

"You are mistaken," said young Goring calmly. "He has gone."

I glanced up at the balustrade where Ostuni had been standing. He was there still, but had withdrawn behind a pillar, and only part of his figure was revealed.

"No mistake, young puppy-dog," said the leader of the mob. "Stand back while we search this den of thieves—this palace of profiteers, this pig-sty. Stand back, or I'll break your head."

For a moment I did not see what happened next between Goring and this blackguard. A window in the great *salon* came crashing through, and several men and ragamuffin boys came through the empty framework. They were madly excited, and with shouts of laughter smashed some of the lights, overturned tables with glassware and porcelain, tore the silk curtains in strips, and wore the rags as scarves. That was what I saw afterwards, though at the time I was only aware of this new incursion and of its pandemonium. Percival Goring had seized a brass candlestick from a bracket on the wall, and raised it above his head; but that gesture of his, which meant a broken skull for someone, made the foremost men recoil a moment.

Then something happened which was the worst thing.

. . . At least, as bad a thing as any woman might do in treachery to a husband for the sake of a lover. It was a girl who did it, and that was the pretty Paula with the ripe, red lips and face of witchery.

She was the only woman now downstairs. The others had fled to the upper galleries, leaving the Italian officers and about eight other men on the stairs at the foot of the grand staircase. She had been standing by a carved oak chair, holding on to the back of it with a tight grip, which suddenly she let go to come swiftly like a young tigress in front of Percival, facing that wild-eyed waiter and his mob.

"Do not lay hands on this boy!" she cried. "I beseech you not to harm him. If you want Ostuni I will tell you where to find him."

I saw young Percival lower his candlestick, and all the colour fade from his face, leaving it grey, like an old man's skin.

"Paula!" he said, in a voice of horror. "For God's sake——"

She spoke again, panting, with one arm, one of her plump white arms, thrust out as though to shield Goring.

"If you will let this boy alone, I will tell you where to find the man you want."

"Paula!" cried Percival again. "For the love of God——"

The leader of the mob laughed harshly, and his laughter was echoed by the men behind him.

"We'll let the lambkin go if you tell us where to find the wolf. We want Ostuni, the bloodsucker!"

"He is there," said Paula. She flung up her arm towards the balcony, where still I saw a glimpse of Ostuni's figure behind the pillar.

"Ostuni is up there, hiding, among the women, while this boy shields him."

It was a plain betrayal, deliberate, most treacherous. Ostuni himself heard his wife's words, understood them, answered them.

He came from behind the pillar, and stood, clear in the light, looking down on the mob.

"I am here," he said, in a cold, hard voice. "Do your killing quickly, and spare the rest. I am only afraid

that you should let me live with that woman who betrays me."

At the sight of Ostuni there was a moment's silence among the mob. They stared up at him, with a kind of smiling greediness, like beasts who see their food. Then they surged forward to the stairway. . . .

Young Goring had fallen back to the lower stair, and I was next to him, with other men about us. I saw his candlestick come down like a flash, and the foremost man fell. Then he, too, fell, from a blow in the face. It was like a fight of wolves on that stairway, and they forced us back almost to the first gallery, but not without casualties on their side, and several on ours. An Italian officer of the Bersaglieri, a young giant of a fellow, lifted up one of the rioters and heaved him over the balustrade so that he fell as senseless as a log. I had Italian hands about my throat, and would have choked if rescue had not come just then. It came in the rear of our attackers, and was good enough.

A squad of American bluejackets sprang upon the mob struggling for possession of the stairs, and set about them with butt-ends and with bayonets if they had much trouble. It was a rapid bit of work, and at the end of it, when the prisoners were hustled out, the Hôtel Dandolo, was not a pretty sight. A number of broken-pated and bleeding men lay about the floor and stairs, and among them was young Percival. Paula Ostuni had fled to her room. . . .

She came to the hospital where the boy was being nursed by nuns, but he would not see her.

"Tell her," he said, "that I've had a happy escape." He wept then so that his pillow was wet. His boy's heart had had a nasty knock. He could not forgive that girl's treachery to her husband—the offer of Ostuni's life to the mob—thought it had been for love of him.

We left Venice when the strike ended, after something not quite as bad as a revolution, and by a paper which I picked up in the train I saw that Ostuni had reached Paris in safety. But he went alone.

THE RETURN OF A REBEL

THE RETURN OF A REBEL

WAS dining in the Palace Hotel at Pera—the European quarter of Constantinople, as most people know—when saw Sergius Kovalevsky for the first time after fifteen ears, and could hardly believe my eyes, though I was ertain of him because of the poise of his head, rather ion-like, the broad low forehead beneath a mass of lack hair, and a square, rough-hewn face which had iven him the nickname of "Danton" the hero of the rench Revolution, among the boys of an English school vhere I had been his special chum. We little guessed hen that he would play, for a short time at least, in iolence as well as in human weakness, the part of Danton n a revolution more frightful than that of France in 789.

He was not looking at me with any recognition, though nce or twice his eyes met mine, but at the girl next to ne—Vera Ivanova—with a hungry gaze and a kind of nesmeric intent to draw her eyes his way. But she did ot see him, and sat for the most part staring at the ablecloth as though her thoughts were miles away rom this banquet provided by a Cossack general, and his scene of luxury and vice—vicious because of its rodigal cost in a world of ruin and wretchedness.

I had a moment's impulse to turn to her and say, "Do ou see that man with his eyes fixed on you? That's Kovalevsky."

Discretion checked the words on my lips. Kovalevsky n Constantinople! That may not seem startling now to eople who have forgotten the first phase and outstand-ng figures of the revolution in Russia, and who even ow know only Trotsky and Lenin as the leaders of that

appalling struggle. It was Prince Kovalevsky, once my schoolfellow in England, who had led the way to the communistic ideal which afterwards Lenin imposed on Russia with an autocracy and cruelty which denied all liberty of opinion and made it a serfdom as intolerable in its way as the old tyranny of the Tsars. Kovalevsky was the leader of the Intellectuals who had thrown in their lot with the revolution, and it was the fire of his enthusiasm for the equality and brotherhood of the Russian people, and for peace to end the ghastly massacres of war, which had helped to inflame the hearts of the peasants to whom he mostly spoke.

Some of his words reached out to other countries. Before the worst atrocities of Bolshevism had happened in this convulsion of the great world of Russia, his philosophy and idealism had appealed to men of other nations sick of slaughter, agonised by the long horror of war, and in spiritual revolt against the European system which had led to this insanity. Kovalevsky, away there in Russia, seemed a man with a new vision, the bearer of light in a world of darkness. Then suddenly his light was put out when Lenin rose to power and proclaimed the Terror. Kovalevsky's name dropped out of history, and I, thinking back to him as a school friend, remembering his love of animals, his sensitive shrinking from any touch of cruelty, his passion for English poetry, the idealism which had marked him out among us even as a boy, wondered how far he had gone with the extremists in their reign of Terror before revolting, as Danton did, from the stench of blood.

For more than two years I have seen no mention of his name, and believed that he had fallen a victim to the Terror, like so many others who had led the way to revolution but had not followed the line of its dreadful logic. Now here he was in a hotel in Constantinople, surrounded by Russian aristocrats who had not betrayed their caste as he had done, and were the last remnant of the counter-revolutionary armies which, under Denikin and Koltchak, had led the White legions against the Red, and had failed miserably, and were now exiles in this city of Constantinople, bankrupt in hope as well as in purse, impotent in their hatred against the Bolshevik

power, finding a feverish gaiety in life like gamblers who throw their last coins on to the table, careless whether they lose or win. Among these people Kovalevsky would not be welcome. Not safe from vengeance, I guessed.

I looked across at General Golitzin, my host at this banquet, and wondered how he would act if I revealed Kovalevsky's presence to him. Golitzin was a Cossack, on the staff of General Wrangel, who was trying to organise a new army against the Bolsheviks in the Crimea. In his Cossack uniform, with a long black coat above high boots and a short sword stuck through his belt—he had laid that on one side now while he dined, though he wore it in ballrooms and drawing-rooms—he looked a barbaric fellow. Under his veneer of civilisation, beneath graceful manners which he could assume as easily as he turned from Russian speech to English or French, he was, I am sure, a barbarian, with a streak of the Mongol in his Slav blood, and an inherent cruelty. Stories came to me that he was an *habitué* of the night-life in Pera, where Greeks, Armenians, Levantine Jews, Turks, unfaithful to the laws of Islam, loose women from most cities of Europe, and the worst elements of all the races that meet and mingle in this city between East and West, have given an infamous notoriety to the Grand Rue de Pera as the wickedest high street in the world. One tale told to me by an eye-witness made this Count Goltizin the figure in a rowdy and squalid scene which had reached its climax when he had flogged a half-dressed woman with his Cossack knout. He was drunk with vodka, and his own companions, young officers of the Russian staff, were frightened of him because of his savage rage and brute strength. Not pleasant tales, but as I could not vouch for their truth I did not pay much attention to them, and was only guarded in my behaviour to this man whom I was bound to meet with a certain civility owing to my position in Constantinople. He was drinking champagne now at fifteen Turkish pounds—about three English pounds—a bottle, and helping his guests to it lavishly.

"You drink nothing, little princess," he said to Vera Ivanova. "Another glass of this champagne—bad as

it is in this thieving city—would put a little fire into those beautiful eyes of yours."

A touch of colour crept into the girl's cheeks at this speech, but she did not show any pleasure at the compliment.

"The money this wine costs," she said, "would feed many of our poor refugees who do not get enough to eat."

"That's true," said Golitzin. "But if I gave them the last pearl I have in my pouch—not many left, alas!—they could not all have a good meal. The Bolsheviks have proved the folly of the communal idea, which establishes equality of starvation. Let us eat, drink, and be merry with the last luck that is left us."

He called to the waiter and ordered three more bottles of champagne, but the waiter hesitated, after a word to the manager, who was watching this banquet from afar, and came back to whisper a few words into the ear of the Cossack general.

He swore an oath in Russian and gripped an empty bottle as though to bash the waiter's head with it. Then he laughed awkwardly, ashamed of this momentary gesture.

"These dirty dogs want to see their money in advance! They suspect that I am unable to pay for their filthy food. In Russia, in the old days, we should have known how to punish such an insult. Here it is part of our humiliation."

From the third finger he pulled off a ring which glittered with a single diamond and dropped it on to the table before the waiter.

"Get that valued," he said, "and bring me the change."

The waiter bowed and departed to the next room, where, as I know—for this was no unusual incident—an Israelite, living in the hotel, waited for business such as this.

"This city is filled with intolerable thieves," said Mikhail, who was Vera Ivanova's brother, a weak, dissolute-looking youth who seemed to have a hero-worship for Golitzin, the Cossack general, and laughed or applauded every word he said as though it contained all wit and wisdom.

"It is part of our cross," said an old officer, who had once been in the Tsar's bodyguard and was now a shabby old man in a frock-coat with shining elbows. "Our exile is in a city where there are many low and ill-bred people."

He glanced round the room at the people who were dining at separate tables. It was certainly a strange cosmopolitan crowd, but not, I should have thought, low and ill-bred according to the standard of modern civilisation, apart from all questions of moral virtue. At one table was a Turkish pasha, steeped in intrigue, as I knew, against the Western allies, who at that time were formulating the terms of peace with Turkey and ignoring the menace of the Turkish Nationalists arming themselves in Asia Minor with the support of men like this. He had his wife with him, and she wore her black veil drawn back behind her ears, showing her bird-like face with sallow skin and painted eyes. There were other Turks in the room wearing the fez and ignoring the presence of their hereditary and political enemies, Greek and Armenian merchants, English and French staff officers, and Levantine Jews, who were here with their womenfolk. Most of the European women were, I thought, over-dressed, or, in another sense of the word, under-dressed, in imitation of Parisian fashions of last season but one. They were over-eating themselves, regardless of the cost in Turkish pounds, which reached fantastic heights of robbery in this *caravanserai*, laughing and chattering without restraint, and staring at other groups of Russians and their own people with feminine rivalry and—challenge.

"Who is that young Russian dining alone?" asked the old officer, after his contemptuous scrutiny of this company. "I seem to know his face, but have not seen him here before."

General Golitzin half turned in his chair and glanced at my old schoolfellow, Kovalevsky.

"Another poor devil come to join our exile," said the Cossack. "Ah, here is the wine. Little princess, I insist. You must drink to your sister's luck, at least."

Vera's sister Olga was dancing for the first time that night at the Petits Champs. The dinner was in her

honour, and she was flushed and excited, not only with wine, though she drank recklessly, but at the thought of her first appearance in public. She had taken lessons from the mistress of the Russian ballet, and her name was being put in the bill without disguise—the Princess Olga Ivanova. In this city of exile it was no disgrace, though in the days before the revolution the mother of these girls would have wept with shame at the thought of it. Olga pushed back her blonde hair and smiled at her sister.

"Yes. Drink to my luck, Vera. If I succeed to-night I shall earn good money, badly needed."

"I drink to your luck, my dear," said Vera gravely, moistening her lips with a sip of wine. "But I wish you were not dancing at that dreadful hall. Anything but that."

"She is easily shocked, the little princess," said the Cossack, laughing and patting her hand.

"She would rather I went as a waitress-girl in a Russian restaurant, as she does," said Olga. "It is the fashion for our virtuous ones. But I could not bear the smell of cooking, nor the touch of greasy plates, nor the gallantries of young officers who insist on kissing hands between the courses. It is as bad as Bolshevism."

"It is honest," said Vera.

The younger sister, this Vera Ivanova, whom I had come to know first in that little Russian restaurant of which Olga spoke—I went there day by day, I confess, for no other purpose than the pleasure of being waited on by this patrician girl who was so strangely compounded of shyness and haughtiness, and who blushed when she took my money for the lunch, and talked to me sometimes in English with a charming accent—kept up the conversation as though nothing had happened to her in the last few minutes. Yet I knew, and I was the only one who knew, that something had happened to her of a most startling kind, so that she had become very white for a few moments and was in danger of fainting, and so that now her words meant nothing to her, but were spoken to hide this emotion.

She had seen Sergius Kovalevsky. At last that steady gaze of his had drawn her eyes to him and had

spoken something which she understood. I was watching them both at that moment, and I saw that sudden whiteness of hers and heard the curious catch of her breath. It was as though in this garish room, with its Saracenic arches and plate-glass windows looking out to the glare and traffic of the Grand' Rue of Pera, with its Turkish crowds and carriages, its Greek women parading their painted beauty, and its commercial travellers from all the capitals of the world going back to Tokatlin's with their day's accounts, she had seen, in broad daylight, a ghost. Seeing her distressed I sought a way for rescue.

"It is very hot in this room. General, do you mind if we go into the tea-lounge before setting out for the theatre? The ladies would like to rest a little, I expect."

"My dear fellow, you are right," said the Cossack courteously. "I have enjoyed the conversation so much that I have forgotten my manners."

One forgot the barbarian in him when he spoke like that.

Vera Ivanova rose instantly and whispered, "Thank you," to me, and we went together into the next room and crossed over to a corner partly concealed by curtains, in which there was a low chair. The girl sank into it as though she had become weak.

"You know him?" I asked. "I never thought to see Sergius Kovalevsky again."

She sprang up instantly, and there was a look of fear in her eyes.

"Do not speak that name aloud," she said. "They will kill him if they find him here. He is mad to come."

"What is he to you?" I asked her. "A friend or an enemy?"

She answered simply, in a pitiful way:

"He is my lover."

We were both silent after that, and I could guess nothing that was passing through the mind of Vera Ivanova, except that she was afraid, for his sake or her own. I could see well enough, without more words from her, that the reappearance of Kovalevsky, whom she had believed to be dead, was frightening her. Her own people, who had followed the fortunes of the White army though all disasters to this final *débâcle*—to this

exile in Constantinople—must regard him as one of the authors of their overthrow, and as one of the murderers of their kinsfolk. The purity of his idealism, in which I had believed, would not weigh with them against his association with the enemies of Tsardom and the Bolshevik Terrorists. Vera's father and mother, once in the Emperor's *entourage* at Petersburg, and now living on British charity in the island of Prinkipo outside Constantinople, would rather see their daughter dead than in conversation with a man who had betrayed his name and caste, as they must think—Prince Kovalevsky, his father, had been Master of the Household in Alexander's Court—by going over to the mob. Any one of these Russian exiles, like General Golitzin, would kill him like a dog and think it a good deed if they could do so in this city policed by the Allies. Policed pretty strongly, as far as the maintenance of outward order among Turks and Christians, but without protection, as I knew, against private assassination. Only a few weeks ago a high Russian staff officer had been stabbed outside the British Embassy, and there was hardly a morning without a floating corpse in the Bosphorus or Golden Horn. My friend Kovalevsky—if he remembered me as his friend—would not find Constantinople a safe sanctuary. It was something of that kind I said to Vera Ivanova, and she confessed her own fears.

"He is already sentenced to death. Our people keep a Black List for all the leaders of the revolution. Sergius is mad to come here. Yet I know why he has come, and cannot help a foolish gladness."

"You mean he has come to find you?"

She nodded in a grave, unembarrassed way.

"Before the revolution he loved me with all his soul. It was a boy's love—passionate and fresh—and we used to dream of each other and write long letters if away for even a little while. Then war came and he went away for more than a little while. He was at Tannenburg and many battles. When I saw him again—he came to Petersburg on leave—something had changed in him. He was no longer a boy. Fearful things had made him old. He did not kiss me when he saw me. He said: 'I am not clean. I have wallowed in mud and blood.'

He told me that the war was a crime against the people. He said that our class was guilty of its horrors. Our soldiers—poor peasant fellows—went into action without guns, sometimes with nothing but the bayonet against the German shell-fire and machine-gun fire, and were slaughtered in heaps. 'Our enemy,' he said, 'is not in front where those German peasants are—dupes like all others—but at the back, where a corrupt Government and a filthy state of society are callous of all this death. I am for the people. I am no longer Prince. I am Sergius Kovalevsky, rebel, and revolutionary.' I remember his words, and I remember how at last he kissed me and wept and said: 'Your love was with me in the trenches, and I yearned for you, but now I am going away, and you will never see me again unless you see me on a scaffold or at the head of a rebel mob.'"

"Did you see him again?" I asked her.

"Once before to-night," she said. "I saw him speaking to the people in the great square of Petersburg, after the murder of the Tsar. He stood on a wooden platform and the lights of the street lamps were on his face. They were mostly soldiers in the crowd and they cheered his words. It was like the roaring of animals, with a cruel note in it. That night my family and I went away from the city, disguised as peasants."

She put her hand on my sleeve.

"I tell you these things because I trust you. You will not betray him? I believe you are kind."

"You may trust me," I told her, and she believed me.

We had no further talk then, for Golitzin pulled the curtains aside and said rather angrily:

"Why do you stay here so long? Olga will be late for the theatre."

We went with him through the great "lounge." A band was playing and the Turkish rugs had been taken up from the floor, and those people who had dined were now dancing. We threaded our way through them. I remember bumping against two young naval officers from the American cruiser in the Bosphorus, who were dancing together for lack of partners, and a Greek girl, abominably undressed, who was dancing with a little fat man of her own race, winked her eye at me over his

shoulder. Olga was in the hall, her ballet dress concealed under a long ermine cloak which by some miracle she had brought from Russia, and she was impatient because of our lateness.

"Have you two children been making love?" she asked.

"This child is too old for that," I said.

"Well, you seem to have forgotten my performance to-night. You don't seem to mind whether I succeed or fail."

I wished her the greatest luck, but she was too excited to hear my words. Golitzin glowered at me, and I guessed then, what I knew later, that this Cossack who had flogged a woman in a night-club of Pera—you remember that?—coveted the possession of Vera Ivanova, whose timid shrinking from him, as I had noticed, amused his barbarian soul. Outside the Palace Hotel the Cossack had a Turkish carriage waiting, one of those two-horsed, red-upholstered broughams which are the ordinary hackney carriages of Pera, though it was not more than a hundred yards to the entrance of the Petits Champs. The *kavass* of the hotel, a Turkish porter with a red sash round his baggy breeches, stood at the carriage step and kept back the crowd of loiterers and beggars who always prowl about the entrance of the Palace Hotel. They were mostly Turks of the poorest class, and one woman, with her black veil held across her mouth, led forward a blind boy and thrust out a skinny hand to Golitzin.

"*Effendim! Backsheesh!*"

He waved her back and, whether by accident or purposely I know not, struck the blind boy in the face so that he cowered back.

The two girls were in the carriage before that happened, and did not see this brutality. But Vera Ivanova had seen, I think, another figure in the crowd. It was Sergius Kovalevsky, who stood among the Turkish women, a tall, sombre figure in the uniform of a Russian officer of the Red Cross with a grey smock loosely belted. I looked after him as we drove from the hotel, and saw that he had moved away from the crowd and was walking slowly towards the Petits Champs.

That place is a pleasure-garden on the top of the hill :t Pera, and from one side of it there is a view over the Golden Horn with its shining water curved like a scimitar .cross to the Turkish quarter of Stamboul, which is the eal heart of Constantinople, cleaner, more moral, with . finer simplicity of life among the Turkish people there han this European side of Pera with its shoddy imitation f Western civilisation, its rubbishy shops, its dancing alls and gambling dens and secret haunts. As we went n that evening to the wooden building which is one of hree theatres in these pleasure-grounds, I had a glimpse f the distant domes and minarets of the Suleyman nosque, white under the pale blue of the sky, in which few stars were shining out above the tall black trees of he old Turkish cemetery at the foot of the hill, and I hought that the spirit of Islam dwelling there in the earts of "the faithful" might well be scornful of a hristian faith betrayed and besmirched by the night-fe of Pera. So, too, I think, did Vera Ivanova, for she ighed as she heard the thump and blare of the orchestra nside the wooden theatre, and looked wistfully a moment owards the cypress trees and the distant view.

"How cool it is after the heat of the day!" she said. It is beautiful outside, and quiet."

There was no quietude inside and precious little beauty. he theatre was already crowded when we entered, and ne air was thick with tobacco smoke, hot breath, cheap cent, the paint of women's faces, the fumes of Turkish offee, and the reek of bad whisky. I suppose in that rowd densely packed about small tables on the floor of ne hall and more thinly scattered in the two rows of oxes on each side of the stage there were people of at east a score of nations. Only a few Turks were there, early marked by the red fez, and no Turkish women. he main body of spectators were Russians, Greeks, rmenians and Israelites, with here and there an Arab, Persian, and a Circassian, and among these Oriental ypes little bunches of British, French, Italian, and merican officers, petty officers, and seamen from the osphorus fleet, American naval men, and commerical avellers of Germany, Austria, England, and other ountries. So I picked them out as, from the box which

Golitzin had provided, I stared down at this human hotch-potch, studying their types and manners, while on the stage there came one after another a series of turns by Russian "artistes"—mostly dancing girls who made up for lack of talent by lack of clothes, and succeeded perfectly. Olga Ivanova, who was to try the same kind of part, was due to appear half way through the programme and disappeared from the box under the escort of Count Golitzin—he knew his way behind the scenes well enough, I guessed—twenty minutes before she was due upon the stage. Vera Ivanova and I were left together, and the girl looked down upon the crowd with a kind of loathing in her eyes.

"There is an evil spirit in this place," she said. "The very air reeks of it."

On the stage one of the dancing girls was capering about in a flimsy frock above long white legs, while the orchestra played an imitation—most hideous—of Oriental music, with a steady thump of the big drum and a wild wailing of clarionets and other wind instruments. The crowd gazed at her in a bored way. A young American sailor sitting with a petty officer, and excited by some vile spirit served out to him by an Arab waiter banged a tray in a kind of ecstasy in time to the rhythm of the band. A party of English subalterns, all a little fuddled by the fumes of bad wine, were "carrying on" with some painted women, who, as sure as fate, would rob them before the night was out. Groups of Russians, the exiled aristocrats, paid no attention whatever to the gambols of the dancing girl, but talked and laughed and quarrelled together so that the noise of their voices rose above the strident music.

"The old devil has a playgound in Pera," I said. "I'm sorry for these English and American boys. They must get some kind of amusement, and this is the only kind available, and pretty rotten, too."

"I'm more sorry for my own people," answered Vera Ivanova. "They are lost to all sense of shame. Surely the tragedy of Russia—so much ghastly suffering—ought to have sobered us, and given us some purpose more noble and more ideal than this sort of life. Otherwise the Bolsheviks are justified."

I put my hand on hers with a sudden warning touch. "There is Kovalevsky. He is coming to speak to you."

Vera Ivanova drew back in her box, very white and frightened.

"Dear God!" she said in a whisper.

Kovalevsky made his way through the crowd at the tables, and came straight for our box. No one seemed to notice him, though his tall figure and massive head, with its shock of black hair, made him remarkable even among so many Russians. He disappeared for a moment through the door leading to the boxes, and then opened our little door and stood there behind us.

"May I come in?" he asked quietly, and then took Vera's hands, both of them, and held them tight, scrunched up, and kissed them twice, and said: "Oh, my dear heart! Oh, my dream lady!"

"You must not come here!" said Vera. "Sergius, you are mad to come! They will tear you to pieces if they see you!"

"They have forgotten me," said Sergius. "They have forgotten everything that matters to Russia except their own intrigues and dishonour. They have forgotten their own souls."

"You have forgotten something, too," I said. "An old school friend."

He stared at me hard, a puzzled look in his black eyes, and then grasped my hands and laughed in his old whimsical way which I had known as a boy. "Good Lord!" he said in English. "Old Robin Goodfellow!"

So he remembered the nickname by which I had been known at school, though for him those English days must have seemed like a lifetime ago in another world. That thought came to him then, for he gave a queer groan, and passed his hand over his forehead.

"That boy who was Sergius Kovalevsky is dead. He was a dreamer of dreams, do you remember? He believed in the progress of humanity and the divine power of leadership. I, who bear his name, see only the brutal realities of life and its incurable stupidity."

He turned to Vera Ivanova, again speaking in Russian.

"Where can we meet so that I can talk to you as I want to talk? Here it is impossible, in this foul place."

"It will be dangerous everywhere," said the girl. "For the love of God, Sergius, get away from Constantinople. For you it is a death-trap."

Kovalevsky smiled and shrugged his shoulders in the curious sulky way which I remembered from his boyhood.

"For me it is the same everywhere, and makes no difference. Somewhere—in Paris, or Vienna, or London, or here—I shall get stabbed or shot by one of our countrymen in exile. Kovalevsky's corpse . . . a good sight for the eyes of Russian aristocrats! For a few weeks this Kovalevsky was 'the great Russian patriot.' Crowds pressed about him to kiss his hands, to touch his tunic. That made his name stink to people of his own class. Now the patriot is a pariah dog, and any Russian would kick him to death. What does it matter?"

"It matters to me," said Vera Ivanova.

"Still?" asked Sergius. "You do not shrink from me as a traitor or murderer?"

"You pleaded for peace," answered Vera. "You hated all bloodshed."

"That is true. I hated blood."

Sergius Kovalevsky looked across the theatre as though staring at scenes painted in blood which he tried to wipe from his vision by thrusting the back of his hands across his eyes.

"Our poor Russia!" he said. "Our poor blood-soaked Russia!" He repeated the words which were spoken by a woman—Madame Roland—when she stood below the guillotine on a day of French history:

"O Liberty, how they have played with thy name!"

"Sergius," whispered Vera Ivanova, "they have seen you. Look!"

Down below our box was a group of Russians. They had risen from a table in front of the stage, and had made their way close to us. Three of them were Russian officers of Wrangel's army of volunteers. The fourth was a woman whom I had seen in the Pera Palace Hotel with Count Golitzin.

She was pointing up to our box, and I heard the words she spoke.

"I am sure of him. That is Kovalevsky."

One of the officers stepped nearer, staring at Sergius

with sinister intent. It was just as the curtain rang up for the dance by Olga Ivanova.

Suddenly the officer swung round, facing the whole audience, and shouted out in a loud voice to all the Russians scattered about the hall:

"There is a traitor here! The scoundrel Kovalevsky! Kovalevsky, who incited the revolution and led to the murder of our kinsfolk and the ruin of Russia. Kovalevsky, the Russian Judas!"

The audience had been quiet a moment when Olga Ivanova had appeared. Even in Constantinople it was the first time a Russian princess had shown herself as a ballet-girl. Now from all the places where the Russians sat came the noise of people pushing back their chairs, talking loudly, craning forward to stare into our box.

"Sit down!" shouted some English voices angrily.

"Say, you guys!" yelled an American petty officer.

I heard the name of Kovalevsky spoken by many Russian voices with a kind of incredulity and excitement. Not a soul was looking at Olga Ivanova in her Russian dance. Even the orchestra was overwhelmed by this clamour of voices. A number of Russians, men and women, had thrust their way through the crowd close to the officer who had first denounced Kovalevsky. The women were in their evening frocks, with bare arms and a glitter of jewels in their hair. One of them screamed in Russian, so that her voice rang above the loud murmur in the hall:

"Kill him! Kill him like a dog! Kill the traitor Kovalevsky!"

In our box Sergius Kovalevsky stood leaning against the wooden wall, without any look of fear, smiling contemptuously. Vera Ivanova was pulling at his sleeve and imploring him to escape, but I do not think he heard her. He spoke to the crowd in a clear, cold voice, which those nearest to us must have heard.

"Yes, it is I, Kovalevsky. So you want to kill me? It is good to see you have enough virility even for murder. I should have thought that here in Constantinople, in this loathsome Pera, with its night-life, you would have lost even that amount of courage and desire. The aristocracy of Russia is here. A noble sight which you

believe perhaps would inspire admiration in the Russian masses away there on Russian soil who have been fighting on all fronts against armies paid for by your intrigues in foreign capitals. They are starving, stricken by disease, steeped in misery; but at least they have not fallen so low as the depths of shamelessness in which you wallow here—beggars to England, slaves of money-lenders, merchants of your women's beauty, enemies of your own race. You call me traitor. I tried to lead our people to peace. It was your folly which led them to the Terror. You are the traitors and the runaways!"

Through his speech Vera said: "Hush, hush! Go, Sergius! Go before they kill you!" But in his emotion, controlled under an icy mask, he did not hear her. I do not think many of the Russians heard his words. They only heard his voice above the tumult in the hall, which was now general, as all the Greeks and Armenians and English and Americans were denouncing this Russian brawl, this noisy interruption of their music and show.

But those nearest to our box heard, and one of them, the officer who had first denounced "the traitor," drew his revolver and took deliberate aim at Kovalevsky. The weapon was knocked clean out of his hand by an English seaman.

"None of that!" growled the sailor. "If you want to fight, do it cleanly, with your fists, and begin on me! It would brighten up this show. I find it dull."

Another Russian made a jump and put his leg over the side of the box, and would have flung himself on Kovalevsky if Vera Ivanova had not struck him in the face with the back of her hand. It was a light blow, for she had no strength, but it made him lose his balance so that he fell heavily among the other Russians below him, to the great joy of the English sailor, who laughed loudly.

From Russian voices I heard the words "Kovalevsky!" and "Death!"

"Fools!" said Kovalevsky, still white, but calm.

I grasped him roughly by the arm and spoke so that he was forced to hear me.

"Look here, this is a stupid business, and you must

clear out! This is our box, and if you want to get murdered let them make a mess of you somewhere else. Vera Ivanova does not want to be in the middle of a dog fight. Remember *her*!"

It brought him to his senses.

"You're right," he said. "I'll go."

He kissed the girl on the shoulder and then made a movement to leap out of the box to the crowd below, that hungry crowd of Russians baying below him like hounds.

I pulled him back and swore at him.

"You fool! Come round to the back. There'll only just be time to slip away."

I pushed him through the door of the box and, half dragging him, ran with him down the corridor. We came face to face with Golitzin, the Cossack general, who seemed startled and savage.

"What's all this tumult?" he asked. "Olga is in tears. I'll shoot the devils who are making this riot."

I did not answer him, but ran past, still clutching Kovalevsky, alarmed lest Golitzin should recognise this man.

We came outside the theatre, where a small crowd of Turks had collected, hearing the shouts inside. By good luck there was a Turkish carriage outside the gate of the Petits Champs, and I pushed Kovalevsky in, and then, standing on the step, shouted "Taxim!" to the driver. It was not too soon. Four Russian officers rushed through the gate after us as the carriage started. I heard a pistol-shot and the snap of the bullet abominably close to my head. The Turkish driver heard it, too, and it put the fear of Allah into his soul. He lashed his horses and we went at full gallop past the British Embassy and swung round towards the Gardens of Taxim. At this hour the streets were almost deserted. A few British soldiers slouched along the sidewalks, singing a music-hall song. They stopped to stare at our carriage with its galloping horses. A party of Ottoman gypsies in tattered robes prowled about a rubbish-heap at the corner of a narrow street going down towards the Bosphorus, and they fled with shrill cries as our horses nearly ran them down. I stood up in the

carriage and touched the driver. "Stop!" I shouted to him. He pulled up with a tug at the reins, and I saw that he was still scared by the thought of that bullet which had nearly made a hole in his head. The horses were wet with sweat, and I remember the picture of our carriage under the light of a street lamp by the side of a white wall, with the tall figure of Sergius Kovalevsky lighting a cigarette so that the flame of the match glowed on his pale face. It was not really dark there, except under the wall. In this Turkish night the sky was like a curtain of blue silk spangled with stars. A crescent moon was just rising above the black spear-heads of cypress trees in a Turkish cemetery behind a barrack-like building—a hospital—in the narrow lane where we stood.

"Where are we going?" asked Kovalevsky, when I had thrust some paper money into our driver's hands and signed him to go back.

I told him I had a lodging at the end of the lane, with an English servant whom I could trust. It would be a safe place for him.

"For a while," he said. "But they're sure to find me, and that will get you into trouble. I'd better play a lone hand again."

I believe he would have gone off then and there if I had not taken his arm and led him down the lane. We went past the hospital, a lonely place with a ghostly look about its burn-out wing, where moonlight filtered through frameless windows. Almost opposite were the lodgings I had in a little old Turkish house, built of wood like all of them, behind another high wall. I had the key of an iron gate, which I shut and locked again after Kovalevsky had passed through. The dog of the old *imam*, or priest—who lived in the lower part of the house close to a little mosque, into whose minaret he climbed five times a day for the call of prayer—came and sniffed at us, but wagged his tail when he recognised me as a housemate.

"A good hiding-place if a fellow wants to hide," said Kovalevsky.

"None better," I answered. "As long as you stay close you will be safe here."

The trouble was that after a couple of days my friend did not want to stay close, but was as restless as a caged eagle. He was a fellow of extraordinary moods, feminine almost in variability and emotion, though he was virile enough in many ways and reckless of personal danger. One thing which kept him quiet for a while was my collection of English books, in which he found old friends with a kind of boyish delight. He buried himself in a volume of Shakespeare, and though I left him for two hours sitting on my balcony overlooking the Bosphorus, where some of our battleships were lying, mirrored in the unruffled sun-swept waters, he had hardly stirred when I came back, and was sitting back in a cane chair, with his long legs tucked up, and a lock of black hair over his forehead and a smile about his lips.

"Wonderful stuff!" he said. "'As You Like It' takes me back to the English countryside which I loved so as a boy. I can smell the moist earth again and see the green glint of English woods. It was a good old world when Shakespeare lived, joyous and laughter-loving. And yet he does not hide the cruelty which was there, too. Man is a cruel animal, all through the ages."

For a time he refused to talk about Russia and his Part in the revolution. He talked a lot about our old school-days and the fellows he had known, but he dropped that with a groan when I had to tell him that so many had been killed in the war.

It was on the second night of his stay with me that he revealed himself rather passionately. After supper he had paced up and down the balcony outside just like a caged animal, coming to a halt now and then to stare at the scene below the garden, beyond the little white mosque with its minaret to the wide sweep of the Bosphorus, where the ships lay quiet. The stars came out before the blue faded out of the sky, and lights glimmered on the warships. Beyond, the Asiatic shore stretched away, with the lights of Scutari clustered at the water's edge below the slopes of Bulgurlu, and clear-cut against the pale sky rose the tall white minarets of Buyuk Djami, the great mosque built in honour of Mirimah, the daughter of Suleyman the Magnificent. A band was

playing on one of the British battleships, and its music came faintly up to us. When it ceased there was a great silence around us, except for the flutter of bats skimming about our balcony. Into this silence came a long wailing cry, rising and falling in an Oriental scale. It was the voice of the *muezzin*, the old *imam* dwelling in my wooden house, who had mounted to the turret of the little minaret in the neighbouring garden to call the faithful to prayer. We could see his figure like a dark shadow there against the whiteness of the tower. Faintly he was answered from distant minarets, and the spirit of the East and of Islam was in those voices intoning the Koran above this city of Constantine.

Kovalevsky had stood quite still after his restless walking up and down, up and down, until the last notes of the chant wailed into the stillness of the night. Then he turned and called out in a tragic way:

"O God, if You have any love for men, give us peace! Have mercy on Russia! Have pity on our women and children!"

That night I sat with him on the balcony almost until dawn, and he talked and talked under the stars, while I smoked many cigarettes and listened, and said hardly a word. He described his days in the war on the Russian front and the horrors of all that mass of human suffering. The soldiers of his regiment, all simple peasant fellows, were often short of ammunition under the flail of German fire, and were ill-fed and ill-clad. so that they starved and shivered in the rigours of a Russian winter. The living dwelt among their dead, the wounded lay out until they died. There were no hospital arrangements, no anæsthetics, no comfort for the souls or bodies of men. There were unspeakable and unprintable horrors of men who went mad and did terrible things, of suicides, of boys seized with the delirium of religious ecstasy and homicidal mania. Kovalevsky, not more than a boy himself, had watched all this, tried to find some purpose in it, some divine purpose, and for a time was nearly mad himself. Then he revolted from it, was fired by a revolutionary faith which made him denounce his own caste as the cause of all this tragedy. He discovered the gift of words, and it was this power of his which led

) the desertion and mutiny of large numbers of troops.

"I wanted peace," he said. "I wanted this massacre) end. I believed that out of all this agony mankind ıight learn the meaning of brotherhood, so that Germans ınd Russians should cease from mutual slaughter and ıarch together in a victory for democracy and human llowship."

He gave me glimpses of his first triumphs, his life in 'etrograd after the fall of the Tsar, his desperate en-eavours to avert the spreading anarchy of Russia and ead the people to a bloodless revolution in which all orce should be renounced.

I thought I detected a touch of vanity in some of his vords describing the magic effect of his speeches in the arly days and the hero-worship that came to him. He vas fired by those memories, and his voice rang out as e spoke some of the burning phrases which had in-amed the spirit of great crowds. Then I saw how a hadow had fallen on him and how his soul had walked n darkness as gradually his leadership was overwhelmed y mob passion, by the cruelty of masses long brutalised nd now made animals in their savage instincts of re-enge. His idealism now seemed to them weakness —was weakness, as he admitted. It had no strength t all against the tide of passion which overwhelmed all aws. He had clung to the outward show of leadership n the vain hope of winning back authority long after ıll power had passed from him. He had compromised vith cruelty in the hope of checking it. Yet all his faith vas against cruelty, every fibre of his instinct revolted ıgainst that, and when the atrocities spread he raised his voice against them, preaching charity with a desperate passion which he knew—even then—was futile.

Those who had acclaimed him as a patriot denounced him as a traitor. So it had been with Danton and Camille Desmoulins in the French Revolution, so with all moderate men who stood half-way in the torrent of popular revolt against old tyrannies. Then Lenin came, with his cold, relentless logic, his inhuman in-difference to the bloodshed by which his theories of government could be secured. Kovalevsky went down before Lenin.

"What kind of man is this Lenin?" I asked.

"He is a brain without a heart," said Kovalevsky. "A scientist to whom the world is a chemical laboratory in which he works out the great experiment of analysis and synthesis. Human suffering is no more to him than the sensations of inoculated rats to a bacteriologist in search of a new serum."

Kovalevsky went on with his narrative, mostly psychological, not detailed in its relation of personal adventure. He had escaped from the revolutionary tribunals which had sentenced him to death, had wandered into Southern Russia, working as a peasant, often recognised when he felt most safe, escaping again, hiding again, and all this time searching his soul for its weakness and the cause of failure.

I think he had reached a philosophy of blank pessimism.

"One can do nothing with human nature," he said. "It is incurable in stupidity and in cruelty. The higher instincts of men go down always before the onrush of the baser passions—fear, greed, hatred, revenge, lust. Only here and there are individuals so sensitive to the call of conscience, so masterful over their lower natures that they may remain faithful to a spiritual life based upon the law of love and service, whatever might be the passion of the surrounding mobs. Those men," said Kovalevsky, "are the poets and philosophers, but they are fools also if they believe they can influence the boisterous tides with their ebb and flow of human folly."

The people he blamed most for the misery of Russia—the depths of the misery of many millions, starved, fever-stricken, hopeless, he told me in dreadful words—were those Russians like these in Constantinople, who had declared war against their own race and had duped the enemies of Bolshevism into the belief that they could destroy the power of Lenin and sweep across Russia as Armies of Liberation.

"Sick as they might be of Terror," said Kovalevsky, "the Russian peasants will fight to the death against armies led by the officers of Tsardom, and by all that rabble of reactionaries who have prevented peace with the world and have nailed Russia to the cross."

Yet even here he weakened a little, and found excuses.

"I understand them," he said. "I belong to their caste and blood, though I have renounced their faith. They are blinded by tradition, made cruel by fear, and dishonoured by a false view of honour."

Once he wept with his face in his hands when he spoke of the sufferings of women and children. Yet a little later he laughed at his own misery when in Southern Russia he had almost starved to death, and for a whole month had eaten nothing but raw turnips. A strange man, in whom I found only lingering traces of the boy who was my schoolmate during two years of youth when the world was at peace.

On the third day of his stay with me he tired of his confinement in this old Turkish house, tired of reading and talking, and desired feverishly to go out into the streets of Pera and to call at the restaurant where Vera Ivanova was working as a waitress.

"She is the only soul in the world who understands me," he said. "She understands because she loves. It is wonderful, that! She does not shrink from me, but all her eyes are filled with love, just as when we walked hand in hand together in the days before the war. For a time I forgot her and put her out of my mind. Now she is the only human being who makes life worth living to me. I am going to see Vera Ivanova, my heart's dearest, my beloved!"

I told him the folly of this. Did he want another scene like that in the theatre, this time in the restaurant where Vera worked? Not pleasant for Vera Ivanova. If he loved her with any unselfishness he would spare her from a brawl in which he might be killed at her side. He was not afraid of death. No, but Vera Ivanova might not like his blood over her white apron. He raged up and down the room, swearing that he would go mad unless he could see Vera, and I only calmed him down by promising to go myself and fix up a rendezvous where he might talk to his heart's content.

"Here," he said. "Why not here?"

But there were a dozen reasons why Vera Ivanova should not come to my house to meet him, and the decisive one was the position of General Golitzin's house

—you remember that Cossack's name ?—at the corner of the lane leading to the military hospital and my iron gate. Golitzin, who had a covetous eye on Vera, must have heard all about the tumult in the theatre and Kovalevsky's presence and escape. He must have heard from Olga of the love that was between Vera and Sergius Kovalevsky before the war. Cossack jealousy would not give Vera a safe passage down the lane if Golitzin saw her pass. It would lead most certainly to the discovery of this hiding-place.

"If Golitzin meets you in the dark or daylight, look out," I said. "He's as strong as an ox and as cunning as a Red Indian."

"He's a Cossack," said Kovalevsky, as though that told all.

I went alone to the Russian restaurant down a side street off the Grand Rue of Pera. It was the luncheon hour and the place was filled with Russian men and women, as always at this time. Vera caught sight of me at once, and came quickly to my table with that grace which had first attracted my eyes to her. The white apron she wore above a plain black dress did not disguise her patrician look, her charming figure and spiritual face.

I ordered a plate of *bortsch*, as usual, and while she bent over the big menu sheet I whispered to her:

"Sergius dies to see you. Can you meet me to-morrow at Stamboul by the Suleyman mosque ?"

She nodded and asked: "What time ?"

I suggested three o'clock in the afternoon, when all Europeans would be indoors for the siesta.

"That will do," said Vera.

She answered calmly, but I could see that she was hiding great emotion. She went away and then returned with my plate of *bortsch* and afterwards brushed some crumbs off the table.

"Golitzin swears he will kill him," she said in a low voice, "and me, if I see him again."

At the next table a Russian officer called for her and rose to kiss her hand before he ordered his meal. I did not have a chance of speaking to her again in any private way, for two Russians took places at my table, two Russian girls with quick eyes and ears. I thought

ard while I ate my luncheon, and decided that this nreat of Golitzin was serious. Kovalevsky might take hat risks he liked, but it was another thing about Vera vanova.

When she brought my bill I examined it carefully, nd then wrote on it the words, "Don't come."

"There is a little mistake here," I said. "You have ot charged me enough."

She examined the bill with grave eyes, and said, "Yes, hat is so," and then wrote on it, "I will come."

I could not argue with her. She left my table, and had a call to make at the British Embassy. At five 'clock, when I went to my little Turkish house and told Kovalevsky of the proposed rendezvous, and my fears bout it, he was excited with gladness and pooh-poohed ny thought of danger.

"Nobody will see us in Stamboul," he said. "Once cross Galata Bridge it is as safe as in Central Asia."

That evening he sang old Russian songs, love songs, ouching the notes of my piano and bringing out more nusic in it than I knew it held since I bought it in Baker's varehouse and had it carried to my lodging by a Kurdish orter, who bore it on his back as though it weighed no nore than a handbag. Then he went on to the balcony hen the moon rose and listened to the call of the *muezzin*, nd was standing there motionless, deep in thought, ith the soft moonlight of a Turkish night touching im on the shoulder as he leaned against the door-post, hen I left him and went to bed. I do not think he lept at all that night, for I wakened twice, and each ime I heard him pacing up and down the balcony, and he second time I heard him it was nearly dawn.

At breakfast he was cheerful, and told me the reason.

"Thank heaven I shall see the outside world—and Vera!"

"I hope to heaven," I said, "that nothing tragic vill come of it!"

"You will be with us," said Kovalevsky, "and two hen like us will be knights enough to guard a little rincess."

He laughed at this idea and said he liked the romance f the thought. But I didn't.

"Look here," I said, "you have seen enough reality of life to know that romance is an outworn game. I'm not looking for it."

"Nor I," said Kovalevsky. "I was jesting. Blood and hatred are the ingredients of what the world calls romance, and I'm sick of both. But love remains, and this love that Vera has for me is the one gift that the gods have left a man broken and stripped."

I pitied him when he said those words, for they rang true with the truth of bitterness. Perhaps, also, I had a sneaking faith in romance in spite of my words. I made a careful plan and time-table of our meeting with Vera Ivanova. My plan was to go alone to meet her at the mosque of Suleyman. Kovalevsky would follow fifteen minutes later, and then, if all things were well, we would take a *caique* and row up the Golden Horn to the village of Eyoub or the Sweet Waters of Europe. It would be quiet there, and no Russians were likely to be on that side of Constantinople. In the dusk we could row back to Pera and I would take Vera Ivanova to her flat close to the Tower of Galata, while Kovalevsky would make his way back alone. My object was to prevent Vera being seen in the company of Kovalevsky anywhere in the European quarters.

Kovalevsky was grateful to me and expressed his thanks emotionally. "Your friendship takes the bitterness out of my heart," he said. "For many months I have been brooding on the falsity of life, knowing that every man's hand is against me in my own country, and that the people who once kissed my boots would now pluck out my eyes and trample me to death. And I have outraged my family and caste! I held on to one gleam of light, steered my soul by it—the remembrance of the love which Vera Ivanova had given me and might give me again. Now I have found not only my woman, but my friend."

He grasped my hand and drew it towards his heart, and held it there in his Russian way.

"What is your plan about Vera?" I asked, and at that he was troubled.

"I dare not ask her to join me. They are bound to kill me some time and somehow; but the knowledge

f her love will keep me happy until then. Happy in pite of unhappiness. It will staunch this bleeding eart of mine until the last wound strikes me."

"They will forget you," I said, "if you stay in hiding ong enough."

He shook his head.

"Never! I am doomed—by one side or the other."

Before I left him he gave me a message for Vera, hough he would see her soon again.

"Tell her that I come to kiss her hands and her eyes. ell her that in my darkness she is my light."

"Do not be late," I said. "And look behind you, est you are followed."

So I set out first for that strange rendezvous with a ense of adventure, with a foolish sense of romance, ecause I was a messenger of this tragic love. Tragic ecause I felt that Kovalevsky was right, and that somehere and some time he would fall a victim to the evolution which he had helped to create.

I walked up the lane and took a carriage from the tand outside the British Embassy as far as the foot of alata Bridge, where I dismissed it and bought one of e copper coins for the four old Turks who take their ll from all that cross the bridge—this span which is e link between the Western and Eastern worlds and e roadway of a hundred races. The sun was hot and littering on the water of the Golden Horn, where a rowd of ships lay close to the bridge—one big steamer ound for Venice rising with high white decks above e smoke-stacks of small steamers. Turks, Persians, ircassians, Armenians, Jews, Arabs, plodded slowly cross the bridge. Turkish women closely veiled went o do their shopping in the covered bazaars. Gypsy omen like tattered Cleopatras came to dance in the w haunts of Pera. There were few Europeans at this our, and I saw none on the Stamboul side of Galata ridge, until I was in a narrow passage close to the vered bazaars, from which came the usual complicated nells of moist sugar, Persian carpets, figs, Manchester tton goods, Standard oil, dates, Turkish sweetmeats, nd Oriental spices.

Then, ahead of me, the tallest man in a crowd of

Turks, I saw a Russian officer, or rather a Cossack general, whom I knew at once by his figure, by the slant of his astrachan cap, by the indefinable things that make a personality, to be the last man on earth I wanted to see—Count Golitzin. What was he doing at this hour on the Stamboul side of Constantinople? A sudden fear took hold of me, and I turned sharply into the bazaars, and then ran down one of the covered alleys towards the entrance gate not far from the Mosque of Suleyman. It was only afterwards that I remembered having knocked down a tray of trinkets, thereby arousing the anger of an old Turk, who cursed me in the name of Allah and of Muhammid his prophet.

What was Golitzin doing? Had he followed Vera Ivanova and lost his trail awhile?

The forecourt of the Mosque of Suleyman was almost deserted. Only one or two old Turks were washing their feet at the fountains outside. I hurried towards the low doorways of that great pile of black and white marble, grander in many ways than St. Sophia, rising to a dome which was like a snow-white cloud under the deep blue heaven of that day when I went to meet Princess Ivanova. An *imam* waved me back from the threshold and pointed to the slippers which I had to put on lest I should defile the sacred place within. Impatiently I put them on and shuffled into the dim cool vastness of the great mosque. A few Turks were bowing their heads to the ground, praying aloud in a dirge-like way. The great floor space leading up to the *minber*, or pulpit, was a desert. I could not see Vera Ivanova until I heard a slight rustle of a woman's dress and saw her move from behind a pillar of porphyry. I went towards her, losing one of my slippers for a moment in my haste, so that I had to go back for it. She was very pale and looked frightened.

"I have been followed," she said at once. "Count Golitzin crossed Galata Bridge behind me. I lost him in the Grand Bazaar."

"What's his idea?" I asked in a low voice.

"He has heard about Sergius. He must have kept watch on me. I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I dare not say," she answered, and then she swayed little as though she would fall. I put my arm about er and drew her behind one of the great piers.

"What right has the Cossack to spy on you?" I sked. "If you stay here I will go and meet him and ll him to mind his own business."

I spoke bravely, but I knew that if it came to a quarrel etween Golitzin and me I had no strength to back up old words. The man was a great beast, with the rength of a gorilla and the temper of a devil.

It was then that Vera Ivanova spoke words which rned me quite cold, as though every drop of blood had ft my body.

"I ought to have told you," she said. "Golitzin is ing to marry me next week, unless I kill myself first. was the family who arranged it, and I yielded at last. e has a power over women."

I thought of the woman he had flogged in the night-ub, but I thought more of Sergius Kovalevsky coming meet this dream-woman of his. "Tell her," he said, that I come to kiss her hands and her eyes. Tell her at in my darkness she is my light."

"When Sergius knows that," I said, cruelly enough, I think he'll go mad!"

She put her hands to her face and gave a little moan.

"Oh, my poor comrade!" she said. "My boy lover!"

A dark figure stood in the doorway of the mosque, and thought it was Kovalevsky, who was due to come. ut it was Count Golitzin who stooped to put on the ppers and then came forward with a long, shuffling ride. He started when he came near us, as though eatly surprised to find us there. Then he took Vera's nd and kissed it, and whispered loudly to her:

"How strange that you should be here! I often me for quietude and meditation, which one cannot t in Pera. In the silence of this great old mosque e gets to know one's own soul."

He held out his left hand to me and said: "You are good guide, I am sure."

It was perfectly done. Not by the flicker of an eyelid, the half-tone of any note in his voice, did he reveal spicion, jealousy, anger, or any unkind thought.

We wandered round the mosque with him and he translated the words of the Koran written in golden letters on oval shields, and chatted about the history of Suleyman the Conqueror, for whom this mosque was built. Many times I glanced at the doorway, afraid of seeing Kovalevsky, but no shadow came between the sun and the white threshold there. Kovalevsky was late, or perhaps had seen us and was keeping away.

Golitzin led us outside—I dreaded lest Kovalevsky should meet us face to face—and walked with us to the *turbeh*, or tomb, of Roxalana, the Russian girl who was Suleyman's captive, slave and wife.

"A strange tale!" said Golitzin. "The Conqueror was tamed and enslaved by that woman of his. Never before had a consort of a Sultan received the title of wife and queen. Roxalana obtained complete power over old Suleyman, and after his death murdered her stepson, Mustafa, to secure the succession of her own son, Selim—Selim the Sot, as he was called."

He turned to Vera Ivanova with a smile.

"You see how the strongest of men are weak in the hands of women! They put a spell upon us. We are but clay in their hands."

She did not answer him, but looked nervously away from Roxalana's *turbeh*, and I knew that, like me, she was in dread of Kovalevsky's coming.

"Let us go back to Pera in a *caique*," said Golitzin, and I agreed with him quickly. If we could get away before Kovalevsky came a tragic scene would be averted, for Golitzin's courtesy did not deceive me. Beneath that smile of his was the temper of a beast and the jealousy of a Turkish Sultan. We walked down to the Golden Horn above old Galata Bridge and found a *caique* there. Golitzin gave Vera his hand to help her into the boat and sat close to her under the silken awning. Before the Kurdish boatman rowed away from the shore Golitzin's eyes roved up and down, and I guessed that he was on the watch for Kovalevsky; but only some Turkish boys with their donkeys could be seen below the Mosque of Suleyman.

So we were rowed back to Pera, and I remember the magic beauty of the scene that afternoon when the

›mes and minarets, palaces and gardens of old Stamboul, ıd of Pera on the other shore, were all glamorous in ›lden sunlight, with black shadows cutting deeply ·tween white walls and the tall cypress trees of Turkish meteries rising like black spears into the cloudless ue.

I sat alone, facing Golitzin and the Russian girl, and ıring that voyage on the Golden Horn, when many tle *caiques* passed us with Turkish ladies and Greek rls, I thought only of Kovalevsky and the ending of s love story. It would break the last link which made e worth while to him. That Vera had yielded to ›litzin—I thought of her words, "He has a power over ›men"—would seem to him the ultimate revelation life's cruelty and of his own wretchedness. How tterly he would laugh before he wept.

I left the Cossack and Vera Ivanova at the Tophaneh ıding-stage and went back to my little old Turkish use. I guessed that Kovalevsky would come back .er, having missed his way and the rendezvous.

But I guessed wrong. My friend had not left the use since I parted from him. He was there still, ng dead, with a bullet through his brain, by the book-se. A piece of paper was pinned to his breast, and Russian handwriting, which I made out afterwards, re the words: "A traitor's death."

From the old *imam* who attended the little mosque the garden near by I learnt that two Russians had ocked at the gate and asked for me. He had directed em upstairs, believing that I was still in the house. e had heard no pistol-shot nor had he seen the Russians out again.

I had a queer sense of gladness that they had killed him fore Vera Ivanova told him about the Cossack. At st he had died in the belief that she was faithful in her e of him. In a way she was faithful, for I am sure e still loved this man whom she had called once "my or comrade, my boy lover!" Some fear had made r promise herself to Golitzin.

I did not go to her wedding with him, which I am told s a ceremony of some splendour in the Pera Palace tel.

AN ESCAPE TO GENEVA

AN ESCAPE TO GENEVA

EVERAL people walking in Kensington Gardens on their vay to Knightsbridge turned to look at the figure of the all, thin, clean-shaven man who passed them with a low, steady stride. Perhaps it was the way in which e wore his silk hat, pushed back a little from the fore-ead so that his grey hair was visible on each side of is thin temple which helped them to recognise him nore easily. That angle of his hat had been used by is caricaturists in *Punch* and other papers as a distinctive eature, and they emphasised also the sharp line of his heekbone and his rather hawk-like nose.

"That's Venning," said a young man, jogging the rm of a girl who walked with him.

They were brother and sister, by the look of them, nd stood stock-still to gaze at the passer-by.

"Do you mean the Peace man?" asked the girl with glance of startled admiration.

"That's the fellow. The Right Honourable Matthew enning, K.C., M.P. I thought he was in Geneva—by ne papers—drawing up the scheme for a court of inter-ational justice, and all that sort of humbug."

"Not humbug, Dick!"

The brother and sister continued their walk, arguing, erhaps, about the possibilities of world peace and the nance of saving civilisation, which seemed in a bad way utside the quiet sanctuary of Kensington Gardens, here the last of the autumn leaves were falling.

Matthew Venning was conscious of this recognition y some of those he passed. Such a tribute of fame no nger pleased him or touched the vanity which is in the ul of most men. It had become familiar and stale him, though once, a few years ago, he had thrilled a

a little when people nudged each other and said, "That's Venning!" He was only annoyed now when an ill-dressed fellow slouched into the pathway from behind a tree, raised a black box-like thing and snapshotted him deliberately before touching his hat and saying, "Thanks, sir," with a respectful smile.

"Curse the fellow!" said Venning to himself, though he allowed no shade of annoyance to pass into his eyes.

He had learned to mask his thoughts in public—in private, too—by sheer habit.

Once or twice lately he had caught sight of himself in a mirror and had been rather shocked by the hard, ascetic look of his own face. It was like the portrait of an idealist by a sentimental artist.

"Lord," he had said before that mirror of his, "am I getting dehumanised? Am I becoming nothing but a pose of the blameless public man—a sort of glorified Grey?"

Dehumanised—officialised—that was a horrible thought to a man who even now, in moments of introspection, believed that life held something more for him than work for abstract justice, speeches on the League of Nations, reports on international relations. A little human, personal joy would put more colour into those lean cheeks of his, into his soul. Why not, for a man of forty-two, in the prime of life, at the summit of his career, healthy in spite of ten years' hard labour for his country's sake and—to be honest—for his own?

Three years ago, when he was thirty-nine—how much better that sounded than forty-two!—he had missed one chance of a little human joy, in those very gardens, beneath that tree which he was now passing—the tree with the great crack down its trunk girded round by a steel hoop—near the wooden bench where he had sat with Margaret Harington—Margaret Clandon, as she then was. He stood still and seemed to see her there now in her white summer frock, so fresh, so youthful, so adventurous. He had noticed the extra touch of colour in her cheeks, and the brightness of her eyes, as though they had caught the glint of the sunlight of that day. He had chaffed her, saying, "You look enormously beautiful to-day! You are a public danger

n Kensington Gardens!" and her answer to that had spoiled his daydream and all the reason of his walk from Curzon Street, and his escape from heaps of papers of urgent importance.

"I feel beautiful," she said. "I feel that everyone must be looking at me because of my happiness. I'm going to marry Kenelm Harington."

His habit of wearing a mask was useful to him then. His self-discipline was strong enough to keep his voice steady.

"Rather rash, isn't it?" he said. "The war's not over yet, and the Air Force is a pretty dangerous service."

He remembered her answer, her look of adventure.

"That's why we're going to marry at once. Whatever happens, we'll have our innings—a week or two of all there is in life. Nothing will matter afterwards."

That was the spirit of most war marriages, the determination of youth to seize life, to grasp at all that life might give before death demanded sacrifice. Nothing seemed to matter afterwards—at that time. Yet for those who had an afterwards things mattered.

Venning thought of that as he stepped over the low railing and walked across the grass for a short cut to the path going past the old red-brick palace. Many of those war marriages, begun with such courage, reckless of all risks, had not worked out well for women who welcomed back shell-shocked soldiers, blind husbands, men who were different when they came back; nor for young men who found the girls they had married in haste did not fulfil their first ideals. Yet in spite of those tragedies, youth, he thought, had been wise to take the risk. For a little while, anyhow, they had drunk their cup of joy. He had abstained from it, and felt colder and older for lack of it. Fame was no substitute, not even the knowledge that in his work for fame he had been ignoble or wholly selfish.

In the blue dusk of Kensington Gardens, in this autumn mist, in this sanctuary of old London, within sound of the motor omnibuses and all the tumult of London life, lovers were walking hand in hand or close together, oblivious of all others, careless of the world's

misery after war, because of private satisfaction and the flame in their own hearts. These City clerks and their girls, the little Kensington ladies who had given rendezvous to nice boys from big houses round the Park, were not worrying because the Governments of Europe were jibbing at a court of international justice, while paying lip service to its principles. They were not worrying because civilisation would go down if the old hatreds of Europe—and the old men—prevailed. Venning—the Right Honourable Matthew Venning, K.C., M.P.—envied them their state of mind and their luck of life.

Then he thought again of Margaret Harington, who had taken the risk so gaily. The boy was all right—a bright, brilliant fellow, charming in manner, without a penny beyond his pay, which was good enough then as a major in the Air Force. He was all right until he did a nose-dive over the lines near Arras towards the end of things in '18 and was brought home in plaster of Paris after weeks in hospital. Then he recovered enough to walk about with sticks, and afterwards without sticks. Luck seemed to be with them; but from what he had heard lately the fellow had had a set back.

"Kenelm is nervy—all wrong somehow," Margaret had written. "Come and see us. We're desperately poor, but that doesn't matter so long as Kenelm gets back his health. I'm frightfully worried about that."

So he was going to see them for the first time since their marriage three years ago. It was Margaret he wanted to see. He wondered how much or how little she had changed since that day in Kensington Gardens when he had been greedy for her and for all the joy she could give him, before she told him why she felt beautiful.

Venning knocked at the door of a house in Holland Street, Kensington—a little white house with a shining brass knocker. It had been the love-nest of this young couple in a world of fire and death.

The maid who answered his knock took him into a long, low room, and he saw Margaret again. It was not quite the same Margaret. The look of adventure had left her large brown eyes. There was a look rather of endurance in them, he thought. Some intensity of

experience had thinned her face a little, faded down her bright colour, given her womanhood instead of girlhood.

"It's splendid of you to come!" she said.

"I should have come before," he answered, "but this League of Nations business——"

"Oh, I know you're the same idealist—working for the good of humanity and all that!"

She spoke the words sincerely, though she laughed, too; but Venning shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture of impatience with that side of his life.

"Sometimes work for the good of humanity seems nothing but the excuse of hypocrites."

He was astonished by the change in this girl. She was more beautiful than he had known her. Why had he missed the only success worth having? Why had he been thirty-nine instead of twenty-six? How life mocked at men!

"Don't get up, Ken, if your back's hurting you."

It was when Margaret spoke those words that Venning saw Kenelm Harington in the room.

He was lying on the sofa by the window, or, rather, when Venning came in he had put one leg on the floor and raised himself on a pile of cushions.

"It isn't my back," he said. "It's my damned head."

His voice was sharp and irritable, and Venning saw Margaret's face flush with distress because of her husband's discourtesy. He did not give any kind of greeting to his visitor, but held out a cold, limp hand when Venning went over to the sofa and said, "How d'you do, Harington?"

His answer was not cheerful.

"I can't say I feel merry and bright. Margaret thinks it's nothing but nerves—moral cowardice and all that. Don't you, Peg?"

Venning looked at the man whom he had known as a boy—Harrow's centre-forward ten years after Venning himself had played for the last time. He was nearly thirty now, but still had a boyish look, with a mop of black hair and ruddy cheeks. His boyishness, however, was only superficial, and Venning's watchful eyes saw

that Kenelm Harington had the look of many men who had passed unscathed, as people said, through the war; deep-sunk eyes in which ugly remembrance lingered, and a tightness about the lips, showing nervous resistance to the point of strain.

Margaret answered his remark with a deep sigh, followed by a laugh which did not seem quite easy.

"Nothing of the coward about you, Ken! The Germans didn't think so, Arras way. All the same, I think you're suffering from nerves. If you'd make an act of faith and say, 'I'm as right as a trivet!' I believe you'd be well and strong again."

Kenelm Harington punched a pillow by his side, and all his face flushed with sudden anger.

"For a girl of common sense you sometimes talk the most abject rot, Peg! I got a bang on the spine, as you well know, and if that's not physical I don't know what the devil is."

Margaret was silent. This rough-tongued talk brought tears to her eyes, as Venning guessed rather than saw by the furtive lifting of her hands. She moved across the room to set something on the tea-table, and Kenelm addressed himself to Venning:

"I suppose you're trying to convert the world to the League of Nations. Rather futile work, isn't it?"

"Depends on what you mean by 'futile,' old man," said Venning cheerfully, though for Margaret's sake, and his own, he would have liked to hit this man who spoke so sharply to his wife—especially before visitors, when she could not answer back.

"I should have thought you'd seen enough of war to welcome any plan for securing the peace of nations."

"It's not to be done by the machinery of Governments," said Harington. "Anyhow, the world is made up of congenital idiots who call homicidal mania by heroic names. How are you going to cure that by a court of international justice?"

"You couldn't," answered Venning calmly. "But I don't believe in the homicidal-mania theory. My view is that the mass of people want peace, so that they can get on with their jobs, till their bit of earth, marry and bring up babes. War is only a survival of barbarism,

maintained for their own interest by people of power who put spell words on the crowd."

"That's all bunkum," said Harington savagely. "Men like killing each other. I liked killing Germans. It was the most thrilling kind of sport. Why do men like you play the hypocrite?"

"Ken," said Margaret very quietly, "if you can't talk in a civil way I shall ask Mr. Venning to go. I can stand your bad manners alone—at some cost to myself—but I shan't stand them before my friends. Do you understand?"

There was a moment's silence. Venning felt very uncomfortable, profoundly sorry for the girl. So their marriage had come to this!

That romantic adventure which had made Margaret feel so beautiful that she wondered all the world did not see had become a drab thing of bickering and ill-temper, a tug of war!

Kenelm Harington crumpled up morally. Venning saw a sort of pleading look in his eyes like that of a beaten dog. As Margaret passed him on her away to the door he tried to take her hand, but could not reach it.

"Sorry, old girl," he said. "I'm a nasty-tempered swine. Can't think what's happened to me!"

His wife tightened her lips. The colour had quite left her face.

"You've been sorry before," she told him; and in those words Venning understood a long-drawn misery of quarrels and repentance, temper and tears. After three years of marriage this wife's patience was at breaking-point.

She went out of the room on some pretext about the tea. Kenelm Harington looked at Venning with shame in his eyes.

"You see how it is," he said in a low voice. "I'm just torturing her to death. Slow murder! This injured spine of mine plays the devil with me mentally and morally. I get into the vilest of tempers, say things for which I could cut my tongue out as soon as they have left my lips. And all the time her pluck and her patience have been wonderful, so that I could lick the dust under her feet."

"Have you been to the right doctors," asked Venning, "about that spine?"

Kenelm Harington shuffled off the sofa, grasped the rail of a chair for a moment, and then walked across the room to the mantelshelf with more vitality than Venning had suspected in him.

"The Lord knows how many doctors!" he answered, standing there and looking amazingly well because of the ruddy colour of his skin and his athletic figure, now that he was straightened up. "I've been X-rayed, massaged—every old thing; suffered the agonies of hell, and all to no purpose. It's a waste of time, and for that reason waste of money. How can I write short stories or plays when I'm sitting in electric baths or hanging about hospitals?"

"Had any luck lately with your writing?" asked Venning.

He had remembered that before the war this fellow had been a writing man, the author of a very good comedy which had run several months at the Duke of York's.

"Not a spot of luck! The war has killed my power of concentration. I begin things and can't end 'em. Bits of the war—flying stunts, bombing raids and all that muck get between me and my imagination—put me clean off. It's rough on Margaret. I can't buy her pretty frocks any longer."

"That doesn't matter much," said Venning. "She looks pretty in anything."

A light of pleasure came into Harington's eyes at those words. He seemed to like that praise of his wife.

"She's a wonder!" he replied in a low voice; and he had a look of adoration when Margaret came in again, followed by the maid with the tea-things. It was queer, and rather pitiful, how anxious he seemed to atone for his previous roughness by the tenderness of his way, now that she had come back. Once he kissed her hand when it rested on the tea-table by his side, and he buttered some toast for her and said: "You're not eating a morsel! You'll fade away to a shadow if you don't keep your spirits up."

She smiled at him curiously, as though glad of his tender mood, but not trustful of its continuance. To

Venning she talked of the dismal state of Europe after the war, and of his own work to safeguard the future peace of the world. He was pleased to find that she had read some of his speeches, remembered sentences in them and was proud of his success.

"You're a great man now," she said. "The whole world acknowledges your work for the League. One day this little house in Kensington will have a medallion outside—'Here the Right Honourable Matthew Venning took tea with unknown friends in December, 1920.'"

"You exaggerate the importance of newspaper publicity," said Venning; but he liked her tribute. Somehow in her presence his honour, as he was sometimes pleased to call it, seemed of less importance to himself, except as something which gained her praise as good work done. He could hardly understand that, because she was not a great lady in the sense of exalted wisdom, and her judgment on subjects like the League of Nations could not be based on wide knowledge of international policy. Why, then, should he feel more satisfied with her approval than with that of more distinguished women, which had come to him easily? Perhaps it was her sincerity—so clear and simple, so honest.

Harington did not join much in the conversation. He made amends a little for his previous remarks about Venning's work by hoping that the world would back his efforts. Venning noticed that all his irritability had vanished, and that his body seemed more at ease, so that the whole character of the man had changed. He made some humourous remarks, good-natured, without a touch of bitterness, and looked pleased when Margaret laughed at them. Not such a bad fellow, after all, thought Venning, and repented of his former feeling of hostility.

Then an absurd incident happened which disturbed the tranquillity of this tea hour. There had been a ring at the bell and some murmured conversation in the hall. The maid appeared, embarrassed, and asked to speak to the mistress.

"Who is it?" asked Margaret.

"The grocer ma'am. He's called for payment."

"Tell him to call again," said Margaret very calmly,

but with a look of dismay which did not escape the eyes of Matthew Venning.

The maid hesitated.

"I'm afraid he won't, ma'am. He's rather—rude."

Harington sprang up from the table so violently that he knocked over a cup and broke it.

He uttered a frightful oath, permissible only in time of war, not permissible in a London drawing-room in the presence of his wife.

"Tell the scoundrel that if he doesn't leave the house at once I will come out and thrash him within an inch of his life."

"I will go and talk to him quietly," said Margaret, rising.

He grasped her arm and pulled her back roughly.

"You will do nothing of the sort! Have I no authority at all? Do you think that I'm such a weakling that I cannot defend this house from dirty blackmailers? To hell with the fellow!"

Margaret pulled her hand from his grasp. She was white with anger and disgust.

"Get back to your sofa!" she said. "How dare you use such language and behave so like a brute! Have you forgotten that you are a gentleman and my husband?"

"I only know that we were fools to marry," said Harington, and there was anguish in his voice, and he trembled with a kind of ague.

Margaret went out to the hall, and seemed to pacify the grocer. Anyhow, he left after a minute, during which time Harington had recovered himself and apologised to Venning for making such an idiot of himself over a trifling matter.

"The fellow will have to wait for his money," he said, "until I can earn some. That's another torture to Margaret. Unpaid bills and a husband who bangs his head against the wall for ideas which won't come. What a life for the sweetest girl in London! How she sticks it I can't imagine!"

It was not long after that when Venning took his leave under a plea of work. In the hall under the light of an old-fashioned lantern he held Margaret's hand and

issed it. Perhaps it was that gesture of his, expressing nderstanding and sympathy and respectful love, which roke her down a little. She wept, with her hands to er face, very quietly because of that husband of hers ehind the closed door of the room they had left.

"My poor Margaret!" said Venning.

"You can't think what I suffer!" she said presently. I loved him with all my soul—and love him still—nd yet sometimes I think I must die or go mad because his unkindness. It is all nerves, nerves, nerves. hysically, he is perfectly well. All the doctors say . It's another case of shell-shock. Sometimes I'm fraid of my life with him. And we're so poor, I don't now what will happen. We owe bills everywhere! 's months since he has earned a shilling. I must get me kind of work to keep the house together."

"What can you do?" asked Venning.

She raised her hands, and then let them fall with a esture of despair and smiled in a pitiful way.

"What do English girls learn to fit them for a living? usic, French, a little German, light literature, water-olour painting—rubbish!"

"I'll try to think of something," said Venning. Meanwhile you'll let me lend you some money for old mes' sake?"

She shook her head.

"That will only make one more debtor. Help me to arn something."

Venning did not walk back through the Gardens. was past closing time, and he struck through a little ley into High Street, Kensington, and then picked up passing taxi and told the man his number in Curzon treet. A heap of papers waited for him in his room. His ecretary was worried at the mass of them. But Venning went first to his desk and wrote a letter which kept he secretary waiting for what he knew would be a long ctation. It was a letter to Margaret Harington, and ontained an idea that had come to him like a flash in he taxicab.

I am going back to Geneva on Monday, he wrote. *You ould be extremely useful to me there as an additional*

secretary, especially because of your knowledge of French and German. I can offer you fifteen pounds a week, in addition to expenses. You will earn every penny of it, for I shall work you hard. But it will be interesting work, and for the good of mankind, if there is any use in any work. You need a change. This is a good chance. No doubt your husband has some friend or relative to look after him while you are away. Let me know how the idea appeals to you. Wire "yes" if you can manage it, and I will book your place on the train leaving Charing Cross at 8.30 *in the morning.*

The answer which came next day was "yes." Venning's face flushed as he read it, and he said to himself, loud enough foi his secretary to hear, "I wonder if it'll be all right."

He saw that Mrs. Harington was very pale when he met her at the station on that Monday morning, and he guessed that there had been a painful scene with Kenelm. Probably the fellow had raged and stormed at his wife's decision to play this independent part for his sake. Perhaps he had wept weak tears, poor devil! Venning had a pang of pity for him, being sensitive to human pain. Yet more of his pity was for this lady, who bore on her face the traces of painful hours overnight. It must been a desperate resolution for her, this acceptance of his offer. He did not say much to her at the station, only glanced at her clothes, and said, "Are you warm enough? It's very cold in Geneva."

She touched her fur coat and smiled, but did not speak. Then he introduced her to his secretary, Captain Harker, who was conventionally polite and fussy for her comfort in the train; afterwards to Mrs. Curtis, an American lady who was in charge of some department in the economic section of the league at Geneva. A Foreign Office man was at the station with some papers which he asked Venning to read and return. Various delegates to the assembly travelled in the same carriage and monopolised Venning's conversation on the way to Dover. Once or twice he glanced over at Margaret Harington on that journey and saw that she was thinking back to the husband she had left

hind—remorsefully, perhaps, by the look in her eyes, the tears in her eyes as she stared out of the carriage ndow. He admired her pluck when the American dy fired rapid questions about her line of work in neva and her views on the international situation. suspicion seemed to cross the mind of Mrs. Curtis at she was plucking the sensitive nerves of a human eature who wanted silence and time for self-control. Captain Harker twisted his little black moustache and ade sprightly remarks about theatres and dancing aces, disappointed to find that the beautiful lady oppo- e was hopelessly out of date about the latest plays d the more expensive haunts of pleasure. But he as comforted when he found that she was the niece of dmiral Sir Neville Harington and the cousin of Bishop andon. Anyhow, he was obviously pleased to think at Venning had chosen as an additional secretary a dy of her style and charm. His eyes approved her ess and the blue hat she had bought at Lucile's.

It was not until they were on the boat nearing the coast France that Venning had a private word with her. e was standing among some boxes in the bow looking wards Calais, which was visible through a glinting ist, and Venning saw that some colour had crept into r face again and that she was smiling to herself. hen he spoke to her and she turned to him he had an ea that the remembrance of domestic tragedy was ssing. There was in her eyes, he thought, the same ok of adventure which he had seen in the old days— pectation of things to come which would be pleasant d exciting.

"It's eight years since I've been to France," she said. Before the war and all the horrors. I'm longing to eathe the air of Paris again."

"Not time for much of it," answered Venning. "We all only be there an hour or two."

In the taxi from the Gare du Nord he sat opposite her Captain Harker was next to her, nursing one of her ndbags—and she stared out at the passing crowds rrying homewards after their day's work, all the little *dinettes* and swarms of pallid clerks; and when the b hurtled round the Place de l'Opéra, with its

cosmopolitan throng in the Boulevard des Italiens, where the lamplight shone through purple mist, she gave a deep sigh and said "Paris!" as though it were heaven.

They dined together at Henri's, and Venning was struck by the homage paid by the waiters to Margaret's beauty. It was clear that they took her to be Venning's wife, and that amused him at first, and then stung him with a sense of his loneliness. Life would be different if Margaret were his wife. It would give reason and colour to his work for abstract justice. Under her fur coat she wore a black dress, extremely simple, but giving her a look of elegance. She was aware of the waiters' homage, and was glad of it. There was a brightness in her eyes which had dispelled the shadows of overnight. Captain Harker, with his little black moustache—which struck Venning as ridiculous—was playing the cavalier industriously, and succeeded in making Margaret laugh, which was a good deed, for it was sweet in tone, and Venning saw that she attracted the favourable attention of people at other tables, and especially of two French officers in the dark blue of the Chasseurs Alpins, who tried—and failed—to get a glance from her. It was the privilege of a pretty woman, and Venning was glad that it had come to her again, after the dreary time she had had in that stuffy little house in Kensington, with a sick, neurotic husband, violent in his tempers, menacing even, and too poor to pay the household bills. She was too good for that squalor of life, that nagging of soul.

On the night run to Geneva she retired early to her sleeping-berth, and was fresh and bright next morning at the Customs examination on the Swiss frontier, laughing gaily at Captain Harker's rage because the Customs officers utterly ignored his shouts of "*Passeport diplomatique!*" with a claim of divine right to pass through the luggage without inspection.

"It's an international scandal!" said Captain Harker.

"It's part of the fun of travelling," answered Mrs. Harington.

At Geneva, Venning had booked rooms for her in the Hôtel des Nations, a smaller, snugger place than the Beaurivage, where he was staying; and Harker and he

ent upstairs with her to see that all was comfortable. ıe was delighted as a child with her bedroom, spotlessly ean, and dainty in its decoration with water-colour awings of the Alps. The sitting-room was a tiny ace, with four armchairs of wickerwork and a lace-vered table.

"Is this good enough?" asked Venning.

"For a princess," was Margaret's answer.

Harker said "Au revoir, madame," and went wnstairs to order up the luggage.

Venning stood for a moment alone with Mrs. Harington.

"I'll let you know about work to-morrow," he said. But come round and lunch with us at the Beaurivage. ou'll be amused by the crowd."

"I'm here to work," she told him, and then suddenly ıe put her hand up to her throat and said: "I feel ilty in leaving Kenelm like that. I feel I've no right be so glad at coming here, away from him."

"It'll do you good," said Venning. "Did he take well?"

"He took it badly," said Margaret; and he could see her eyes the remembrance of some dreadful scene, ut she did not say more than that.

"It may do him good, too, to be alone awhile."

Mrs. Harington agreed with that. The words seemed comfort her.

"Yes, we have been too much together. He relied ı me for everything. Anyhow, I could not stand it ny longer—not a day."

She spoke those last words with a tightening of the ps, and there was a quiver in her voice which made enning afraid of tears. She had been tortured, he nought again, and hated that husband of hers who had een broken in the war. Better if he had died at the nd of the nose-dive.

"Well, at lunch then," he told her, and went down-tairs to join Harker and walk with him down the Rue es Alpes to the Hôtel Beaurivage.

He had a suite of rooms in that hotel which he used s offices, and all the morning he was busy with interviews nd the dictation of letters and reports. It was his sual routine, and he did it mechanically, forcing his

mind to the attention of detail and his manner to the necessary courtesy with important visitors. But he was aware of a subconscious pull and distraction that made his work difficult. The personality of Mrs. Harington stood between him and these foreign delegates, and her face was clear to him on printed reports which it was his duty to read. He was annoyed with himself for this mental weakness and lack of self-discipline, and once or twice regretted having asked Margaret to come with him. It was too much of a responsibility, he thought, and then knew that this way of putting it was hardly honest.

"It's too much of a temptation," he said to himself, though not in spoken words, and that startled him so much during a conversation with a Japanese delegate that some reflection of his thought must have been visible, for the little Jap said in his soft purr, "Have I been indiscreet, my dear sir?" imagining that the look on Venning's face arose from their discussion.

Earlier than usual Venning went to wash his hands, as a sign to Captain Harker that the morning's work was done, and then went down into the hall. His excuse to Harker was that he wanted to see Lord Richard Crayshaw on his return from the assembly, but he knew that the real reason was to meet Margaret.

She was not in the hall yet, and he sat in one of the big leather chairs reading *Le Temps* of the day before in such a way as to discourage conversation or questions from the journalists, who were always anxious to waylay him for a word of news or a point of view. He was aware of them now watching for this chance, and nodded to a famous American war correspondent—not out for news or opinions, and therefore safe—who was watching the peace meetings of the League of Nations with the hopefulness of a man who had seen seventeen nations at war and understood the world's need of peace.

Through the swing doors of the Hôtel Beaurivage came the extraordinary crowd which this meeting of the League had brought to Geneva: little Oriental women, Chinese and Japanese, beautifully dressed in European style, as pretty as painted dolls, with their neat little husbands; Paderewski, with his shock of white hair and

ale, sad eyes; French delegates, once representative f revolutionary labour, now immaculate in the silk at and frock coat of bureaucracy; Italian delegates, ith black-eyed, vivacious ladies; a Persian in an strachan cap and long grey overcoat; two Turks wear-ng the red fez; some American ladies for the adminis-rative offices of the League; a former Prime Minister f England, silver-haired, bland of expression, apparently nconscious of the eyes that were turned to him as he ntered; an English Labour Member of the House of ommons, like an English general in mufti, with two ld-maid sisters who seemed to have stepped out of Mrs. askell's books; and a cut-throat fellow with a black eard and surly eyes, from one of the Slavonic states. Vhat a mixture of humanity! What a babel of divers ongues!

When Venning lowered his paper to glance once more t the swing door he noticed that many of these people vere glancing at him, and he heard his name spoken by omeone, followed by the words, "international court of ustice." He wondered what they would think if they uessed that he was not absorbed in the idea of inter-ational justice, but in a foolish desire to see a woman's mile, to hear the sound of her voice, to smell the frag-ance of the scent she used. They would not believe it! 'o them he was an ideal figure removed from common uman emotions. For some years he had almost be-eved so himself, blinded by vanity and self-delusion. Iow something had happened underneath the crust of is self-discipline, beneath that mask of lofty self-conceit, o warn him that common human emotion had not de-arted from him, that human nature was alive in him. Perhaps he had better heed the warning. What was it hat had happened to him? Mrs. Harington had hap-ened, coincident with some call back to the realities of fe. Rather dangerous, perhaps, to a man of his age—ot so old, after all—and his position.

She came through the swing door, and he rose from his hair and went to meet her, regardless of the watchful yes about.

"Have I kept you waiting?" she asked rather reathlessly.

He smiled and said, "I was impatient for lunch."

She told him that she had been down by the lake, and had had a first glimpse of Mont Blanc, with its shining snow above low-lying clouds of grey mist.

"I feel a new woman. I'd begun to stale for a sight of the great world."

The cold air of Geneva, intensely cold at that time, had whipped her cheeks so that they glowed, and there was a bright sparkle in her eyes.

"Come into the *salle à manger*," said Venning. "I expect you're hungry after your walk."

Captain Harker joined them, paid a compliment to Margaret's recovery from the night journey, held a chair for her.

She was excited by the company in the room, those funny little Eastern ladies, those famous diplomats, all those international workers.

"In this room," she said, "are the people who are going to build a new world out of the ruins."

Captain Harker was cynical.

"Most of them are over-eating grossly. Geneva is a wonderful place for feeding. Long dinners follow long luncheons with distressing regularity, and meanwhile Central Europe starves to death."

That thought distressed Mrs. Harington and took her appetite away so that Harker reproached himself and said: "Our abstinence won't help the rickety babes of the world, and we must keep up strength to work for them."

Venning listened and did not talk much. His silence indeed, became noticeable, so that Mrs. Harington accused him of brooding too much over his draft of international justice.

"It's not quite that," he said, smiling at her. He did not tell her that he was thinking how good it would be to have her always by his side. He wondered what she would think if she guessed that thought of his.

After luncheon the former Prime Minister of England buttonholed him, spoke a few words about the League's chance of success, and then blinking a little in the direction of Mrs. Harington, he asked what he wanted to know.

"Who is that devilish pretty woman with you, Venning? Not the Duchess of Standon, is it? My old eyes are getting dim."

"No, sir. It's one of my secretaries, Mrs. Harington."

"One of your secretaries? Ah! I have long made a rule to employ only men secretaries. It's a safe rule, young fellow."

He went away smiling, and in the next day's papers there was a report that the former Prime Minister was in the best of spirits over the settlement of all outstanding difficulties with France on the question of disarmaments.

Venning was not a young and reckless man. Nor was he a man of spiritual or moral weakness. Always he had schooled himself to caution, to the safe path of honour, to the amount of sacrifice necessary for the character of an idealist which had been given to him by his friends and the world. So now he was careful with Mrs. Harington—very careful. For several days, for more than a week even, he avoided all private talk with her, even at table. Mostly he dined out at other hotels with various delegates, and more often than not ate only a few sandwiches for lunch in his working room. From Captain Harker he was glad to learn that she had made acquaintance with other women in Geneva—Mrs. Curtis, the American lady, had introduced her to a miscellaneous set—and had found one or two friends of her own in the administrative offices, so that she was not lonely after office hours.

During the day she worked in his room, or in the room next to him, transcribing some of his reports for the typists, translating French and German documents, and now and then interviewing some of his foreign visitors. He noticed the quick way she had, the admirable accuracy of all she did, and above all the tact with which she dealt with people who called to waste his time. She was worth the money he had agreed to pay. She was worth more than that to him. Her presence in his room, so quiet and unobtrusive, gave him a sense of well-being. He liked to hear the rustle of her frock. He liked to see the light on her hair as she sat at a desk near the window overlooking the lake. He liked to see the little pucker on her forehead as she pored over German script.

Captain Harker was nearly always in the room with them, a fussy, industrious, humorous little man, who often expressed his sense of satisfaction with life by saying in an ecstatic way, "Well, this is better than the dirty old ditches round Ypres!"

It was Harker who suggested to Venning one afternoon that he was working too hard and ought to knock off for an evening and hear some good music.

"Where?" asked Venning.

"Mrs. Curtis collects a jolly crowd in her flat every night after dinner. Good coffee, remarkable females, a violinist who plays like an archangel, and Mrs. Harington at the piano. It would do you good, sir."

"Yes, come," added Mrs. Harington. "It's real fun, and all the people are kind and good."

"I'll come to hear you play," said Venning.

That was the first night in Geneva that he had any private talk with her. He came in rather late, a few moments after Mrs. Curtis had said, "Our great man thinks better of it." Mrs. Harington was playing then some melody by Chopin, and Venning stood inside the room, motionless, after a whispered greeting from Mrs. Curtis. It was a queer crowd, he thought. There were two or three Polish women with their hair cut straight round the nape of the neck, several American men sitting on the floor with their knees hunched up, a young French officer, and queer-looking specimens of unknown nationality, but probably Italian or Greek. Margaret Harington sat at a rosewood piano on which there was a shaded light. Although he had entered the room silently, she was aware of his presence, for she looked towards him and held his eyes with a little smile for a moment. That smile of hers with some message in it made his pulse beat queerly. She looked very happy, younger than when she had met him at Charing Cross, extraordinarily charming. He had no idea she could play so well.

A silence followed the end of her melody, then a murmur of applause, a little clapping.

"You're wonderful, my dear!" said Mrs. Curtis.

One of the Polish women led her from the piano and kissed her hands, speaking in French:

"*Mais c'est merveilleux! Vraiment, madame, je vous félicite! Quelle sympathie! Quelle émotion!*"

"It was a real treat, Mrs. Harington!" said one of the American men.

"I'm ashamed to play in the presence of a great master," replied Mrs. Harington, smiling at one of the Slavs with a mass of uncombed hair above his limp collar.

"On the violin I am something," said the man in French. "On the piano I am a little baby."

It was then that Mrs. Harington greeted Venning. He bent over her hand and kissed it, and it was only Mrs. Curtis who opened her eyes rather wide at this homage of a great man to his secretary. The Poles and other foreigners accepted it as the right way of behaviour to a lady of talent and of beauty. Margaret herself was not embarrassed, though she smiled and remarked that he had learned foreign ways in Geneva.

They sat together on a low sofa, but did not talk during twenty minutes, while the violinist was playing —wild and marvellous things in which Venning fancied he heard the cry of hungry peoples and the spirit of revolution rising to madness, and at last the death of a race. It might have been that, or Nature in travail, or this man's soul in agony. Strange and haunting stuff anyhow. In the buzz of conversation that followed he talked to Margaret.

"Are you happy in Geneva?"

"Wonderfully happy," she told him. "It's a great adventure, and England seems a world away. I'm beginning to forget the little house in Kensington."

"Forget it!" he said.

Some contrition seemed to take hold of her after that, for she spoke of her husband.

"If only Kenelm were well again, so that he could join me here!"

"Do you want to go back to him?" asked Venning. He spoke the words brusquely, almost sharply, though she did not seem to notice his tone.

She lowered her head a little when she answered: "I think I should die if I went back to the same conditions. That's an awful thing to say, isn't it? Am I wicked in thinking it?"

"You've had a bad time," said Venning, a great pity in his voice.

"It was always worse for Ken. He hates himself for being so—irritable and all that. Cries and blames himself. When we married he was the sweetest boy in the world. It's war that altered him—so much that I am sometimes terrified. The curse of war! The cruelty of war!"

"The cruelty of life!" said Venning.

They had no more private talk that evening, and Venning had to go early because of a late meeting with the British delegates.

"It was perfectly charming of you to come," said Mrs. Curtis. "A great honour for all of us."

"A great treat for me," was Venning's answer, and that was utterly sincere, and he hated to go from this place where Margaret stayed.

As he walked back along the lakeside with his fur collar tucked up to his ears because of the biting cold, he thought back to her words about her husband—"I think I should die if I went back." He would see that she need not go back. Perhaps . . .

He did not finish that "perhaps," but stood still for several minutes in the black shadow spaces beyond the electric lights outside the Beaurivage, with his hat pushed back from his forehead as usual, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets. His reverie ended with a sharp word that was almost a groan, perhaps almost a prayer—"Lord!"

Then he went in to the meeting of British delegates, and none of these men had the thought that the Right Honourable Matthew Venning was troubled about his honour or concerned with anything less international than the international court of justice.

The days passed, and there was nothing to report, as the official bulletins used to say during the war, when men were dying in great numbers. Venning knew, though, that in his own soul there was active warfare, breaking down his will-power, smashing down all the barricades which he had built in years of respectable routine against the barbarian and the primitive man. Now the primitive man was winning, though sometimes

he called it common sense and freedom from conventionality and pity and the human right to joy and other fancy names. Once in office hours, when Margaret touched his hand inadvertently as she handed him a paper, he had a quick thrill as though touched by some vital spark, and his hand trembled so much when he took the paper that she noticed it and questioned him.

"Are you unwell?"

He shook his head and told her that the room was stuffy.

The most curious thing happened to him when he was addressing an assembly of delegates on the completed plan for the court of justice as it had been approved by the law officers of many advisory committees. All his life's work was summed up in this address, or at least the crown of his career was there. He was perfectly master of himself. Every point was in his mind, well ordered. He could see the approving glances of his audience, heard one or two of their whispered comments as he paused now and then.

"The sincerity of the man is what is so convincing."

Those words were spoken by one of the colonial delegates.

The sincerity of the man! The sincerity of the man!

Venning's thoughts seemed to be fixed by those words. What was his sincerity? He had posed as an idealist. In every newspaper they called him that, wrote slush about his austere and blameless life, set him up as a spiritual leader of men. Now he wanted Margaret Harington. That fellow Kenelm had no right to her. He was a neurotic creature who tortured her by his passions. It was ridiculous that she should ever go back to him. It would be good to take her to Italy in the spring. They would wander among pictures, perhaps spend a week or two in Florence, and then in Venice. She would look exquisite in a gondola. How she would laugh at the serenades of the *gondolieri*! How she would —how she . . .

It was Captain Harker who whispered to him, "Are you ill, sir?"

Good Lord, he had forgotten all about the court of

international justice and lost the thread of his speech! Where was he? He fumbled with his notes, which till then he had not used. Oh yes, the application for judicial remedy! Venning picked up the broken thread, went on to a good and clear end, received the applause of the delegates. By Jove, a near shave! He had been in a daydream, ridiculous and inexcusable.

It was some nights later when he spoke to Mrs. Harington in the hall of the Beaurivage before dinner.

"Let's dine together—in some quiet restaurant—on the other side of the lake. I want to get away from the crowd."

"That would be splendid," she said. "You're looking worried, quite haggard. Is it overwork?"

"I haven't been sleeping well," he told her as an excuse, and it was true enough.

They went together across the lake, and Margaret Harington liked the look of the lights on the water and leaned over the ferry to watch the little black ducks scurrying out of the way of their bow.

"Aren't they funny!" she exclaimed with a note of laughter.

He held her hand as she stepped out of the boat and offered her his arm when they walked along the quayside towards the restaurants in which lights were gleaming across the lake.

"I'm worried about Ken," she said presently. "He hasn't written for ten days. In his last letter he hinted at another operation. I cabled to him to-day."

"An operation?"

Venning spoke the words calmly, but some vision came to him of this girl's husband lying dead. That would be a good thing. That would make all things easy. There would be happiness again for Margaret, and all he wanted for himself. So he thought, and then realising what he thought was shocked at this vision of his. Was he going altogether wrong? Was he going to prove all his life a lie?

Yet, after all, what was wrong? Wasn't it hideously wrong that Margaret should have to endure misery all her life with a man unworthy to be any wife's husband? Was it not a lie for him to pretend to inhuman superiority

to the desperate need of men's souls, which is love and the beauty of life? His conflict began again, tearing him.

Mrs. Harington was quite unconscious of this struggle in the man beside her. She only thought him preoccupied with exalted thought.

They went into one of the lakeside restaurants—a quiet, shabby place, almost deserted.

A Swiss waiter came forward, bowing, and desired to know whether the gentleman would like a private room.

"Yes," said Venning.

Mrs. Harington smiled and said in her chaffing way, "Your food will cost you more."

Venning helped her to take off her fur coat in a little room with panelled walls, furnished in the Empire style, though some of the gilt had worn off the mirrors and the carpet was frayed. They sat together at table, and the waiter was obsequious in his suggestions for dinner.

"Not so much talk about it," said Venning coldly. "Bring us something to eat."

When the waiter had gone for a time he put his elbows on the table, with his chin propped on his folded hands, and smiled at Margaret Harington.

"This is good," he said, "this peace and quiet, alone with you."

She smiled back at him.

"You might be dining with the great ones of the world. It's kind of you to condescend to Cinderella."

"Condescend?" He mocked at the word. "I suppose you know you're the prettiest woman in Geneva. Younger men would envy me."

She was amused by those words of his, and a little blush crept up her neck.

"The prettiest woman? Then there must be a dearth of beauty here."

"There is," said Venning.

Margaret Harington seemed to be thinking of all the women she had met since her coming to Geneva.

"Yes," she admitted, "they're mostly rather plain. But what does it matter? I think I dislike pretty women. I like the kind and ugly ones. Prettiness! It's a hateful word."

"Beauty," said Venning.

"Oh, beauty! That's different."

"You're different," said Venning.

"Different from what?" she asked.

"From other women—all of them."

For the first time Margaret Harington seemed to be aware of something in Venning's look, something in his way of speech which startled her. There was adoration in his eyes, and hunger, and a kind of primitive look. Kenelm had looked at her like that sometimes before their marriage and afterwards.

"It is close in this room," she said. "I would almost rather dine in the larger restaurant."

She rose from the table to open the ventilator, and Venning stood beside her and caught hold of her hands and spoke rapidly.

"Margaret, don't be frightened! I'm not going to do anything foolish. But I want to tell you that you need never go back to that poky little house in Kensington, to the misery of your marriage. I love you, my dear, and I want only your happiness, and mine as part of it. After this League business we can go away to some good place, some beauty spot, and then——"

He did not say what would happen then. She pulled her hands out of his, not with any violence, but firmly, and turned away from him. He saw that her eyes had filled with tears and that her face was white.

"I had no idea," she said. "I thought you were only very kind, and sorry for me."

"I want to be kind," Venning answered her, "and I'm enormously sorry."

"You forget Ken," she said.

"He deserves to be forgotten. He has dragged you down to squalor and wretchedness. He's breaking your spirit. You say yourself you can't go back to him."

"Did I say that?"

She stood there, white-faced, large-eyed, not looking at Venning, but looking, it seemed, away from Geneva, across Europe to that poky house in Kensington where her fretful husband lay. She saw the months of wretchedness there, felt again the strain that had reached breaking-point, considered the life that would lie before

her when she went back again. Venning seemed to read her thoughts.

"Is it possible?" he asked. "Your return to all that?"

A slight shudder shook her. Venning came closer, took hold of her cold hands, kissed them with a sudden, released passion.

"My dear," he said huskily, "we could be so happy together! We could do good work."

"No," she said, "it's madness—and wickedness."

"It's the call of life. My love and yours—the divine right of love."

"Dishonour!" she said, speaking harshly. "A forfeit of all you have worked for, your reputation?"

"I'm sick of reputation, the false pose of public life. I want happiness."

"This is not the way," said Margaret Harington. "There would be no happiness for either of us if your name were dragged into the mud and I knew myself to be the cause of it. Besides, there is always Ken—and my vows to him, and the boy I remember in him."

Venning was silent for a minute. Her words echoed the thoughts that had been working in his own mind in conflict with other thoughts. But he challenged them sharply.

"My name is nothing compared with your love, if I might have that. As for your husband, he has broken all need of loyalty by his treatment of you. You say there is always Ken. How do we know that? Perhaps he will die soon and make you free."

It was astounding that he should have said that brutal thing, but the vision of Margaret's husband lying lifeless stood before him again, strangely clear.

"It would be the best thing for all of us," he added. "For him as well."

"Perhaps for him," said Margaret, and she spoke in a pitiful way.

"And for us?"

He asked the question eagerly, and waited for her answer. But that answer did not come, because the waiter interrupted it with bowls of soup, which Venning would willingly have poured over him.

"Let us be sensible," said Mrs. Harington, and she sat at table again and signed to him to take his place. She was glad of the waiter's fussiness, his questions about wine, his elaborate etiquette of service. He took them to be man and wife, or he would have been more discreet, perhaps, with his presence.

Venning answered abruptly, wished the fellow with the devil secretly, and once in his absence sought to get the conversation back to where it had ended with an unanswered question. She shook her head.

"Don't let us spoil everything."

"I want to arrange all our life," said Venning.

She became very pale again and begged him not to make her cry in that public place.

"I love you," he said. "Are you not glad of that? Tell me once you are glad, and I won't say another word to worry you—here."

She looked at him as though she saw to the depths of him.

"I'm sorry," she told him. "I thought your kindness was—for kindness' sake."

It was then that something happened which seemed to both these people at the time like an apparition, frightening and accusing. Quick footsteps, not the waiter's, had come up the staircase, and Margaret was the first to see a figure standing in the doorway. It was the figure of Kenelm Harington, her husband, in an old rainproof coat which he had worn in the war. For a moment his eyes seemed dazzled by the light in this room. Then he came forward with a joyous laugh, and called out her name.

"Margaret!"

She stood up at the table, deathly pale, not believing at first that her eyes told the truth. Venning had swung round in his chair and had his masklike face.

Harington pulled off his cap, dropped it on the floor and seized his wife's hands.

"Harker told me you were here. Do you see a change in me? Something has happened! I'm fit and well again!"

"Well again?"

"Cured!" he said. "It wasn't my spine. It was

my silly old head—a bit of bone pressing against the brain. 'Kill or cure,' said old Hartley. You remember Hartley, the Harley Street man? 'Kill and be damned to you!' I said. 'I'll take the chance—for Margaret's sake.' Peg, sweetheart, I'm just as I was before. Do you forgive me all the rest—those miserable years?"

Even Venning could see that the man was changed. His boyishness had come back to him. He seemed ten years younger than when he lay on the sofa in Holland Street. There was a brightness in his eyes, a new vitality in all his manner.

"Ken!" cried Margaret. "Oh, my dear boy again!"

She wept, with his arms about her.

It was extraordinary how changed he was. Some evil spell seemed to have passed from him. In the days that followed, when Margaret still worked as Venning's secretary, he stayed in her hotel, writing a novel which went easily and well, and now is known by the public. He was unstinting in his gratitude to Venning for all his kindness to Margaret, and to his wife his tenderness was unchanging in devotion, rebuking her secret apprehensions that the evil spell might come back again. Happiness came back to her.

"It's a second honeymoon," she told her husband, "and better than the first!"

MISS O'BRIEN COMES TO ROME

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I WAS in Rome on a newspaper mission which seemed to me fantastic and impossible, until a little diplomacy and a lot of luck fulfilled my purpose. It was to get an interview with the Pope on the subject of international relations and the state of Europe after the war. It meant a time of waiting in the Eternal City while the introductions with which I had come procured me admittance to certain high ecclesiastics at the Vatican, and to one, especially, whose influence was the only chance I had, and that a slender one, as it seemed to me, of obtaining a favour which had hitherto been denied to all my rivals.

I was not impatient. A man would be a fool indeed, and blind to all beauty, if he resented spending a week or two in Rome during the month of May, when roses are already fragrant in the Borghese gardens and the Tiber runs like liquid gold under its bridges, and a cloudless blue sky canopies the domes, the ilex trees, the Roman columns, the marble palaces, and the yellowy-brown walls of this old city which enshrines the heart of the Pagan and Christian worlds.

Like any other tourist, with a red-backed guide I "did" the usual sights, walking up the vast highway of St. Peter's, astounded by the immensity and grandiose splendour, visiting many churches raised to the honour of men and women whose saintship was revealed in times of bloody persecution and wild anarchy of morals, and, by touching old stones, in Roman baths and temples, in Christian catacombs and shrines, getting that thrill of contact with the world-old pageant of human life which makes our present time of trouble but one short chapter in the book of progress through strife, agony, spiritual fervour, intolerance, cruelty, and love. . . .

Then, at night, so luminous in Rome after the purple dusk, so warm in May, I loved to sit outside a café in the Piazza di Venezia, the great square beyond the palace of Vittoria Emmanuele, dazzling-white, where brilliant lamps gleamed upon its marble frontage—too new and garish in the day—with glinting rays of its gilded statuary. Smoking too many cigarettes, over a cup of black coffee or a flask of Chianti, I watched the drama of life about me: Italian officers of the Bersaglieri with their plumed hats, swaggering up and down with big swords, jabbering still about Fiume after months of passionate oratory, or flirting with girls whose black eyes stared at them out of white-powdered faces, while they licked up rose-tinted ices. Here and there, tall above the little Italian warriors, strode a Swiss officer of the Papal Guard, in swallow-tail coat and cocked hat, or an American officer belonging to some mission in Rome. Priests in black felt hats and black gowns passed silently through the crowds before darkness summoned them to monasteries and churches, and now and then came a monk with sandalled feet under a rough habit girt about him with a stout cord. Carriages passed on their way to the Opera, and the light from street lamps shone a moment on the white shoulders of women and the white shirts of men, and glinted on jewels and medals. As a contrast to this wealth of class and caste in a city suffering from the wounds of war, beggars came up to the café tables, whining for charity, dreadful-looking beggars in filthy rags, with claw-like hands, or no hands at all, but the naked stumps of mutilated arms thrust before one's eyes as pleas for charity. The heroes of the war—some of them—still wearing bits of uniform, and decorations for valour; but others were pre-war miserables, long in the profession of beggary and now suffering from many new rivals. . . . Was there some fear of insurrection in Rome, after war and victory? I noticed how, when dusk had fallen, many bodies of troops came marching out of dark archways, patrolling the streets, with a watchful and sullen look. But the crowds about the cafés seemed careless and cheerful in spite of strikes and riots in many towns of Italy, while Rome had fallen back into the ways of

peace, and hid what wounds she had under her cloak of beauty.

It was outside a café in the Piazza di Venezia that I saw a friend of mine whom I was glad to see because of old comradeship, and who, as I shall have to tell, brought me into touch with a national drama, and with a tragic episode of human relationship, more interesting to me (when I knew the whole story of it) than my personal adventure in trying to interview the Pope.

It was my friend Desmond Whyte, who sat at a table close to mine, staring at the crowd, as I was doing, while he smoked a cigarette. He must have been there some time before I noticed him. He was in civil clothes, so that he looked different from the man I had seen two years before in the uniform of the 8th Hussars, with a a little Irish harp on each side of his collar. But it was the same clean-shaven face, with a hard, clear-cut profile, and dark eyes which had come down to him from those Norman ancestors who were given Irish land by an English Henry. He wore a felt hat pushed carelessly back from his forehead, so that I could see a touch of grey about his temples.

When I rose and put my hand on his shoulder and said, "Hullo, Desmond, old man!" he started violently, and turned sharply, with a look of alarm and what seemed to me a gesture of defence, as though he imagined himself attacked. Then he recognised me, and grasped my hand.

"Sorry I startled you," I said. "Did you think I was a German, seeking vengeance?"

"No, I thought you were an Irishman."

I did not get the meaning of that queer answer at the time. Desmond Whyte was Irish himself, though Protestant and Unionist, as I well knew, after many talks with him in old days before the war, when we had haunted theatres together in London and talked late into the night in his rooms looking down on Holborn from Staple Inn. A long time ago, as time is counted by experience.

We sat talking together now—he shifted to my table and ordered another cup of coffee—and it was quite a time before I noticed that his left sleeve was empty, or rather that he had lost his arm up to the elbow.

"By Jove!" I said, touching that empty cuff of his. "When did the Huns do that to you?"

"They didn't do it. It happened to me in Dublin, when I helped to put down the Rebellion of '16. It was an Irish lad who did that kind act to his own flesh-and-blood!"

He spoke calmly, and only in the last words did he reveal his bitterness.

"Tell me," I said. "I never heard the inside history of all that."

He shrugged his shoulders and answered impatiently:

"A dirty tale. Best forgotten."

A beggar-woman came up, whining for money and clutching a thin-faced boy of sixteen or so who guided her blindness. Whyte gave her a bit of paper money, and then, as they slouched off, pointed to the boy.

"There were lads no older than that in that Dublin affair. Slum kids, some of them, as miserable as that. I hadn't the heart to shoot 'em down, though, by God, they were shooting good men of mine from the bushes in St. Stephen's Green and the windows in the houses opposite. 'Keep back from the window,' I told my sergeant; but the poor fool put his head above the sash, and was sniped in a second. He was with me in Flanders, and had the D.C.M. He left a wife and two kids. After that I lost five men, shot down like rabbits as I led them down an alley. . . . A bloody business which makes me sick when I think of it. Have a liqueur?"

He refused to talk any more about that rebellion in Dublin, when the Sinn Feiners took advantage of England's campaign on the Somme and did some wild work before they were crushed and rounded up in droves of prisoners. He dismissed the whole thing with a sentence of abhorrence.

"I'm an Irishman, and I know the old wrongs of Ireland: but, by God, I can't forgive my people for all that treachery. Let's talk about something else."

To obey his wish—and I saw how much distressed he was by these old memories—I asked him what he was doing in Rome; but for some time he evaded an answer, pretending that he was just there for his health, and sight-seeing. It was only when I chaffed him a little

for his secrecy that he drew his chair closer to mine, and swore me over to the strictest confidence.

"The truth is," he confessed, "I'm doing a little secret service work. This city is a rendezvous of intriguers—and worse than that. I'm keeping my eye on some of them, and reporting home. It's not a pleasant game, but it has to be done for the sake of the poor old Empire, and as a one-armed man, no damn good for other work, I've taken it on."

I did not cross-question him, and I hadn't the faintest idea what his line of inquiry might be and of what nationality his particular intriguers were. I told him that I was trying to get an interview with the Pope, and he laughed ironically, and said, "I don't think!" Then, presently, he told me that there were others besides myself who would like to get inside the Vatican. His own job would be easy if he could have a heart-to-heart talk with certain Cardinals who should go unnamed.

"On what subject?" I asked.

It was an abrupt question, and caught him out, so that he answered with passionate indiscretion, as I now know.

"On the subject of Sinn Feiners, whose propaganda is spreading like poison among all our enemies—and friends—and whose plans will lead, as sure as fate, to a most bloody massacre in Ireland."

To his great annoyance I confessed to a good deal of sympathy with the point of view of Irish nationality, and he answered roughly enough that I knew nothing of Ireland or the Irish, and had no right to an opinion.

"You're one of the sentimentalists," he told me, "who will hand Ireland over to a gang of murderers, and begin the break-up of the Empire, out of sheer weakness and good-nature and emotional stupidity."

"Strong words!" I said, laughing at him; and then, to change the subject, asked him if he knew that Kitty O'Brien was in Rome.

If I had touched him on the flesh with a red-hot iron, I could not have given him a more sudden shock.

He jerked back in his seat, and all the bronze of his face was whitened by a sudden pallor.

"Kitty!"

He spoke her name as though the sound of it frightened him, and I knew I had put my foot into a bog of clumsiness as deep as Flanders mud. Kitty O'Brien and this man, Desmond Whyte, had been good chums before the war, both in Dublin, where she played so brilliantly at the Abbey Theatre, and afterwards in London, where she increased her reputation at the "Court" in the plays of Bernard Shaw. I had been a good friend to both of them, or at least they found it useful to meet at my little house in Kensington on Sunday afternoons, to which I now look back as the pleasantest memories of life because of the laughter, and the liberty of speech, and the friendship of merry souls. They were little gatherings of "intellectuals," as we liked to think ourselves, and with no more material delight than a few cheap cakes from the Sprig of Heather near-by and some cups of Lipton's tea, we used to feast on fantasy, discussing art and poetry and drama and the very latest idea (as old as the hills !) with an air of flippant wisdom and a sense of security, until something happened to scatter the company and make all our little ideas futile in the face of shell-fire and great death. Kitty O'Brien was the beauty of those days, the Irish rose whom many men worshipped, and her wit, her grace, her gaiety, uplifted all of us. Desmond Whyte was one of the crowd, shy, rather silent, with dark moods of depression at times, but passionate in the expression of opinions when speech came to him, and romantic because of his good looks. He had had worshipful eyes for Kitty O'Brien, as I now remember, and there were times when I thought that in spite of their quarrels and they had quarrelled often about Irish politics, which were all a mystery to me) she favoured him more than other men. Then the war came, and finished all that. . . .

"I have not met her yet in Rome," I told Whyte, pretending that I hadn't observed his emotion, "but I know she is here, because she has been to see Cardinal Hervé, who asked me whether I knew her."

"Do you know if she has seen other people at the Vatican ?" asked Whyte, with a careful attempt to camouflage his excitement, which was visible.

"I haven't the least idea," I told him, and then said

that I proposed to call at her hotel next morning. She was staying at the Bristol, in the Piazza Barberini.

"If I were you," said Whyte slowly, "I should be careful of that lady! She's up to the neck in Sinn Fein. She was in prison for six months after the rebellion. England's too hot for her, and I'd like to know what she's doing in Rome."

"I'll find out for you," I said laughing. "But, better still, call on her with me and find out yourself."

He hesitated for a moment. I fancy he had an idea of accepting my advice; at least, that his memory of Kitty O'Brien tempted him to that idea. But he shook his head.

"I can never meet her again," he said, and as he spoke I thought, by the way he stared out into the Piazza, that he saw some ugly thing standing between him and the memory of that girl's beauty.

She had not lost her beauty I found when I called on her next morning at the Bristol, though, like Desmond, her hair had been touched with grey by six years of history. But she was still an Irish rose, full-blown, with a southern warmth of colour in her cheeks, and brown eyes with delicious lashes. Gay, too, after six months of prison—I had not known that before Desmond told me—and with the same playfulness and grace that had been hers on the boards of the Abbey Theatre and in my rooms at Kensington.

"Mother of God!" she said to me, when I met her in the hall of the hotel. "Is it a ghost I see?"

Then she took both my hands and held me at arm's length, and stared at me up and down.

"Six years of war have made a difference to the poor man!" she exclaimed. "And yet not too much difference for the sight of you to bring back merry memories of glad old times and good friends we'll never see again."

"So you remember the little house in Kensington, and the music, and the chatter and the wild ideas?"

"And the twopenny cakes from the Sprig of Heather, and the little low chair that was always mine unless I squatted on the floor. Do I not remember, and wish myself back again in the days of youth and fun!"

"The years have not touched you," I said. "You're just as beautiful, Kitty, as when all my boy-friends were in love with you."

She dropped a deep curtsey, to the astonishment of the hall porter of the Bristol, who smiled at her with the homage of all Italians to all pretty women.

"I thank you for the compliment, and indeed you lie like an Irishman and a gentleman, blind to my grey hairs and my crow's-feet."

"Crow's-feet be hanged!" I said. "There's not the touch of any claw on those roses of yours. Come for a walk with me, and tell me all that's been happening to you in the dreadful years."

She was dressed to go out, and wore an enchanting hat of blue straw and a frock of some sky-blue stuff that showed the grace of her figure, so that I was proud to go walking with her, and pleased with the tribute of admiring looks paid by the Roman populace as we made our way to the Pincian Hill. I noticed that several Italian ladies and gentlemen bowed to her, and one old Cardinal, driving in an open brougham, lifted his tasselled hat with such a sweep as a Prince of the Church might give to a royal lady.

"Rome seems to know you!" I said. "Your fame has spread from the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Or are you playing a great part in the Eternal City?"

"I'm playing a good part," she answered. "Not of the old play-acting kind, though that was good, but real as life and death."

"Not tragedy, I hope?"

"Mostly comedy, here in Rome," she told me, "but with tragedy as the penalty of failure, if we fail, for poor old Ireland. But we're not going to fail. We're going to win. We're winning now all along the line."

"Don't you think you had better go back to Bernard Shaw parts?" I asked her. "They're much safer, and the green room is healthier than the prison cell."

We sat on a stone bench by a clump of palm-trees on the high terrace that looks down over Rome, where the steps called the Scala di Spagna go down to the Piazza of that name, giving a wide vista of the old city, with its sun-baked palaces and the white domes of many

churches and tall ilex trees with every leaf sharp-cut against the blue of the sky.

Kitty O'Brien wrote some word in Irish characters in the white dust at our feet, and then turned and smiled at me.

"So you know I'm an ex-convict, on ticket-of-leave? Sounds awful to a respectable Englishman, doesn't it?"

"Damnable," I said. "Why did you do it?"

"Because I'm Irish."

That answer seemed to her amusing, and she laughed aloud with that blackbird note of hers which I had heard so often on the stage.

"That accounts for a lot!" I admitted, laughing with her, "but not for everything."

"Meaning what?"

I remember she put her head on one side and glanced at me in a quizzing way when she said that.

"Meaning that it doesn't account for black treachery to England on the part of a young woman who has many English friends. Forgive me for speaking plainly, my dear."

"Not treachery to England," she answered, "but loyalty to Ireland!"

I groaned aloud, thereby startling an Italian officer reading the *Corriere della Sera* on a neighbouring bench, much to the amusement of Kitty O'Brien.

"Why that awful sound?" she asked.

"Because of your awful paradox," I told her. "Don't you see, really, that it *was* treachery, inexcusable and unforgivable? England was up against the biggest war in history, fighting for the liberty of the world, with her men dying like flies in the massacres on the Somme, and Ireland chose that moment to stab us in the back, to conspire with our enemies, to shoot down our soldiers in the streets of Dublin."

She put her hand on mine with a friendly touch.

"Why, where's your logic, Englishman? Don't you see that England was a hypocrite, pretending to fight for the liberty of small nations, and refusing to give liberty to Ireland? And don't you remember that Irish soldiers were dying like flies, too, in those Somme fields?"

"There ought to have been more of them," I said. "You refused conscription, your young men stayed

behind on their farms, you lived on the fat of the land while England was rationed to the edge of hunger; and then you started that mad rebellion, that wicked and bloody business."

"Bloody enough," said Kitty O'Brien, "and too wicked and bloody when the executions began with drum-head court-martials. But are you like all the English, who repeat the same old phrases and cannot see their own stupidity?"

"Explain the stupidity," I asked. "Show me how we are wrong!"

"You're all wrong, Englishman," said Kitty O'Brien. "You're wrong from the beginning, because you don't recognise that the Irish people are a separate people, in race, in faith, and in pride, refusing, after five hundred years of oppression, to surrender their nationality. At the beginning of the war we offered to raise Irish brigades to the extent of all our manhood if they could fight under the Irish flag. That was refused. Then you tried to conscript us, and we said, 'To hell with English conscription! We don't recognise your power to coerce us.' Those men of ours fighting on all your fronts, in all your regiments—one hundred thousand of them—were helping to win liberty for other folk while Ireland was refused her rights of freedom, the common rights of nationality, the claim of her spirit for a thousand years. We claimed that right and raised the Irish flag. You shot down our boys who tried to defend it, and in colder blood, with mockery of justice that was murder, executed the patriots of Ireland who had proclaimed our independence."

I groaned again, not so loudly this time, but bitterly.

"Young soldiers of ours, home on leave, were shot in the streets of Dublin without arms in their hands."

"Not unless they showed fight," said Kitty.

"Besides," I argued, "what liberty was denied to Ireland? In what way was she oppressed by England? What justification was there for this armed rebellion at such a time, or at any time?"

Kitty O'Brien shook her finger at me like a schoolmistress to a naughty boy who forgets his lessons.

"You've read Irish history," she said. "You know

now your people crippled our industries, depopulated our land, strangled us by alien laws, and tried, but failed, to kill our faith."

"We made amends," I claimed.

"In a little way," she admitted, "but only by material bribes yielded for very shame in the hope that, growing fat, we should lose our pride and acknowledge your right to rule."

"That's neither fair nor generous; and anyhow," I said, "I regard that rebellion of '16 as a black crime, and although I am sympathetic to Ireland, up to a point, I can't defend the present methods of Sinn Fein, which is making an anarchy in Ireland—these shootings of policemen, these attacks on our soldiers, this attempt to set up an Irish Republic."

"My dear friend," said Kitty, "you're an Englishman, and I can't expect you to agree to an Irish Republic. If I were you I shouldn't—except by sheer necessity. But, as an Irishwoman, I know that this necessity is coming to you because your own people will not stand for the brutality of your reprisals, and still less for the horror and bloodshed of civil war on the grand scale. Ireland will win her freedom."

"Don't let's argue," I said. "This picture of Rome, and this May-day, and your beauty, are too good to spoil by passionate argument. Do you remember any of the old friends in London?"

"All of them, with love in my heart," answered Kitty O'Brien, and I wondered how she could reconcile that with her hatred of England, or at least with her hatred of English government, and then understood a little, having seen English Tommies give cigarettes to German prisoners, and much fraternising in Cologne, in spite of all the massacre.

She spoke of several men we had known: Halliday Brown the artist, and Vincent Knox the singer, and old "Jumper," as we used to call him, and she clasped her hands to her breast in a prayerful way when I told her that these three had been killed in the war.

"There was another friend," she said presently, after a little hesitation at his name, which then she mentioned. "Desmond Whyte."

"He came through all right," I told her, "and he is here in Rome."

That was a great surprise to her, and I saw that she remembered those old days when he had been her worshipful knight; perhaps—I did not know—her accepted lover.

"Ask him to come and see me," she said, "if he cares."

I told her abruptly, and rather brutally perhaps, that he had left half an arm in Dublin, where it had been blown off by some Sinn Fein friends of hers. She became very white at that news.

"God help him! Was he there at that time?"

"As a captain of Hussars," I answered.

That distressed her in a remarkable way, though what difference it made that Desmond Whyte should be in the Hussars I could not tell then, though afterwards I knew.

"For the love of God," she cried, "don't say that of him!"

"Why not?" I asked.

She did not answer that question, but presently, after a silence when I saw a tragic look in her brown eyes, she told me that it would be better if she did not see Whyte again. We had no chance of further private talk, for at that moment Kitty was greeted by a young Irish priest and his sister, and together we strolled into the Borghese gardens, and after a while sat near the Æsculapius fountain by the refreshment-house in the Garden of the Lake, and ate ice and fed pigeons with crumbs of biscuit, and watched Italian babies throwing bread to the ducks.

The Irish priest, to whom I had been introduced, spoke to me about Kitty, and said that she was the life and soul of "the movement" in Rome.

"What movement?" I asked, stupidly enough, and that startled him so that he flushed up to his forehead before he answered.

"I thought you were one of us. An Irishman, I mean."

"Neither Irish nor Sinn Fein," I said, "but a loyal friend of Kitty O'Brien."

She heard that, and, I think, guessed what had happened, for she spoke to the young priest in a chaffing way.

"Don't tell him too much! He's English to his narrow-bones, though an honest gentleman."

"Thanks for those last words, ma'am," I said, bowing to her, and after a little while I took my leave of the party and went down the steps of the Piazza di Spagna, and so back to my hotel in the Via da San Niccolo Tolentino, where I found a note with the surprising news that the Pope would grant me an interview one day that week.

I confess I was rather excited at the extraordinary stroke of luck that had come to me, for as a journalistic *coup* this interview would attract world-wide notice; so, after dinner, feeling the need of discussing the news with a friend, I strolled round to see Desmond Whyte at the address he had given me at our last meeting. He lived beyond the street of the Quattro Fontane, close to the church of Santa Trinita de' Monti, near the Villa Medici, and upon inquiry in the porter's lodge I found that he had rooms at the top of the house, on the fifth floor.

It was some time before my knock was answered, and then the door was opened on a chain, and Whyte's voice asked sharply, "Who's there?" He seemed relieved when I assured him, and, unfastening the chain, opened the door wide, with a friendly "Come in!"

"You seem a bit nervous of callers!" I told him, with a laugh, and he said:

"Well, you never know nowadays, in this time of peace!"

His rooms were charming, with some good paintings on the walls and lots of books, but the glory of them was the view out of the windows of his sitting-room looking right across Rome towards the Capitol and the Esquiline and Palatine hills. The sky was a velvety-blue, spangled with many stars and all splashed with the Milky Way, wonderfully bright. Below, old Rome was quiet down there, with thousands of twinkling lights, and with a vague radiance on some of its white domes and walls above little blocks of darkness and shadows spaces where the ilex trees slept in their gardens.

"Rome!" I said, after a long silence at the window which framed this picture. "All the history of the

world has passed through those old streets between the hills. The ghosts seem to come up to one. Old Nero, Caligula, all the Roman Emperors, Christian saints, martyrs, popes, the sack of Rome, the Renaissance—Lord, what a crowd of ghosts!"

"Look here, my lad," said Desmond Whyte, "don't you summon up so many ghosts in one breath! I'm not fond of ghosts, anyhow, and prefer to forget 'em. Come and have a drink."

He produced some whisky, and I told him my good news, which seemed to him incredible; and we sat yarning of old times, until presently Whyte broke in abruptly on some story of mine.

"I saw you with Kitty O'Brien to-day."

"In the Borghese Gardens?"

"Yes. I passed by, but you didn't see me."

He flung his cigar away with a nervous gesture, and looked out of the window again to that picture of Rome by night. But it was not Rome he saw.

"She was as beautiful as when I saw her last, before the war. I heard her laugh, just as in the old days."

I told him that she had asked about him, and that seemed to worry him.

"Did she know about that—that affair of mine—in Dublin?"

"I told her. She seemed sorry."

"Hell!" said Whyte. "I wish you hadn't told her."

He started pacing up and down the room in a nervous way, and then turned to a dead halt, with his back to the window, so that he was framed in the velvety darkness and the stars.

"Kitty and I were in love with each other in the good days," he said. "At least, she wore a ring of mine until half-way through the war, when she sent it back in a match-box. It came to me in a dug-out in Flanders—that damned little match-box."

He laughed, but there was no mirth in the sound.

"What did she do that for?" I asked.

"Same old trouble," said Whyte. "Ireland! . . . I had written some pretty fierce letters about the trouble there—before the Rebellion—and she didn't like 'em; said I was no true Irishman. After that, by the devil's

own luck, I was ordered to Dublin. I'd rather have gone to hell, but it was the same thing really."

"Not quite as bad as that!" I said, laughing at him.

But he answered gravely, "Just as bad as that for an Irishman who doesn't like to shoot his own folk, however wrong they are. Or to be shot at by them."

"Are you still in love with Kitty?" I asked, and it must be remembered that old friendship gave me the right of inquiry.

"Why," he answered simply, "I thought I had put her out of my mind, by sheer will-power, but when I saw her to-day, when I heard her laugh again, all that silly camouflage slipped off, and I knew she was still everything there is to life."

He had been speaking quite calmly, but now he broke out into a kind of cry.

"God! what am I going to do about it?"

I tried to give him some kind of hope, and suggested a way out of his trouble.

"I'd go and see her again if I were you! It was easy to see by the way she asked about you that she still likes you, old man. More than that, I guess. And, anyhow, why should these ridiculous politics stand between you? Politics! Good Lord! there's nothing in that game to get between a man and his mate."

Desmond Whyte was not a bit comforted by those remarks.

He came away from the window and sat down heavily and groaned.

"It's not a question of politics," he said. "This Irish business goes deeper than that. It's deep in the blood, already, with more to come. Blood and death. Murder and outrage. The old horrors of civil war."

I was startled by the passion of his words, by the tragedy of his face. The man was suffering in his soul. Too much I thought, seeing Irish exaggeration in this way of putting things.

I told him so frankly, and charged him with over-colouring the facts. But he turned on me with a sudden anger.

"Have you been in Ireland? Or, at least, don't you read your daily papers? It's guerilla warfare there,

and rightful things are happening every day. English soldiers shot. Irish police. Women and children. Protestants and Catholics. The Union is challenged by an Irish Republic, and every man must now make up his mind on which side he stands. Civil war! One side or the other. I'm a Protestant Irishman, against the Republic. I've sworn allegiance to the King, worn his uniform, done dirty work, as well as clean work, in obedience to duty. Kitty O'Brien is Catholic and Republican, and between us is a gulf of black waters, getting red with blood. It'll be a red tide before the fight is finished."

"Why not a truce?" I said. "Surely to God we can fix up a truce, and then get to some agreement. The English are willing to give everything except a Republic."

"And the Irish," said Whyte, "will take nothing less than that. What's the use of talking? It's got beyond words—to bloody deeds, on both sides."

I launched into a rather futile argument about reconciliation, but I don't think Whyte listened to a word I said. He was brooding over secret thoughts, and only attended to me when I spoke to him again about Kitty O'Brien and urged him to call on her and have it out with her, in a friendly way. It could do no harm. It might have happy results for him and for her.

Whyte answered me rather savagely:

"You don't know what you're talking about. You're ignorant of the facts."

I was a trifle offended, and, shrugging my shoulders, told him that in that case it was no use trying to be of use to him, or to show any sympathy with his distress, which I had tried to do for friendship's sake. . . . That hit him, and he expressed regret for his rudeness, and spoke in a more gentle way, but with black melancholy.

"There's something I haven't told you. I ought not to tell a living soul, because my life is at stake on it—not that I care much for that. . . . You were talking of ghosts when you came in. There's a ghost between me and Kitty, which I see always, though she doesn't know. That's the worst of all. The ugliest thing."

I had no faint idea of his meaning, and it seemed to me that perhaps his head was turned a little by long

brooding, or an old touch of shell-shock which had broken his nerve-control.

"A ghost?" I exclaimed. "What do you mean by that, old man?"

"It's like a Greek tragedy," he said. "Old Æschylus would have made a play out of it. Fate, and all that, weaving a noose round the neck of a man, then tightening it at the appointed time. No escape."

"Give us the clue," I said.

He went back to the Dublin Rebellion, his service there with his squadron of Hussars, the smashing of the Sinn Fein plot, the crowds of prisoners brought to trial. Then abruptly he revealed the abominable memory which haunted him.

"The leader of the Rebellion was Fergus O'Brien. That was Kitty's father. An old man, and a poet, but with a flame in his sick body. I was one of the officers of the court-martial which condemned him to death. There was no question about his guilt. He made no defence except refusal to recognise English law. I was one of those who condemned him to be shot, and it was a firing-party of my men who shot him as he sat in his chair, too ill to stand, in the white mist of dawn."

There was a long silence between us, after this story. Presently I said, "Great God!" and Whyte answered quietly with the words,

"Yes, it's like that."

From some disjointed sentences which he spoke afterwards I gathered that there had been a terrible outcry of grief and rage in Ireland when O'Brien was executed, and that all the officers of the court-martial had been warned of vengeance. Three of them had been killed already. His own name had never been published, and he was certain that Kitty did not know, because of things she had said to friends of his, but there were others who knew, and his turn would come.

I knew then why he kept his door on the chain. I heard it rattle when he shut the door after me that night, and as I walked up the street of the Quattro Fontane, I was disturbed because I heard two men talking with an Irish accent, and found them following in my footsteps, though presently they turned off.

It was perhaps characteristic of Whyte's Irish temperament that, having given me every reason why he should not meet Kitty O'Brien—and after his last story it seemed to me unanswerable—he should have met her by what, I am sure, was no accident. It was in the little garden of the Palazzo Barberini—that exquisite picture-gallery built for Pope Urban VIII by Bernini and others, and still the shrine of Guido Reni's masterpieces, and of Raphael's portrait of Margherita, his mistress, the "bold-faced jade," as one critic has called her. Kitty O'Brien, as she told me afterwards, had gone to see the Holy Family by Andrea del Sarto, for which she had a great affection, and it was when she came out of the palace into the sunlit garden, where lizards were playing on the marble monuments among the flowers, she saw Desmond Whyte standing in the pathway, so that they came face to face.

She told me that he was very pale, and came up to her and spoke her name. She herself felt strangely shaken at the sight of him,because of the love that had been theirs, and their estrangement. But she felt no anger against him, only sadness that he should not be on her side in the conflict for Irish liberty; and she held out her hand to him. He did not take that for some reason—I think it was because he felt her father's blood on his hand—and stood looking at her with a kind of hunger in his eyes, and immense sadness.

She said, "It is long since I saw you, Desmond."

I do not know what he answered to that, but presently, so Kitty said, he broke out into a passionate appeal to her that she should abandon "the desperate adventure," as he called it, of the Sinn Fein plot. She laughed a little at that, protesting that she was engaged in no desperate work, but only advancing to good cause in Rome by peaceful propaganda, and by collecting moneys which flowed into Rome for the Sinn Fein funds from many friends in Europe. That, I believe, was the real truth about her mission in Rome, though doubtless she was in close touch with many Irish exiles and residents, including cardinals and priests, who were warm advocates and active supporters of the "Irish Republic."

Whyte put her explanation on one side, harshly. In

an excited voice he warned her that she was an instigator of murder and bloodshed. He assured her that the claim for an Irish Republic was madness, because it would be resisted to the death by the English people, and would lead only to renewed massacre and anarchy in Ireland. Suddenly his voice broke, and, in a pitiful way, he appealed both to her womanhood and her faith to use her influence on the side of peace.

"As a woman," he said, "your heart should bleed for all the Irish youth, for their wives and sisters and unborn children, who will be sacrificed to this campaign of hate and terror. As a Catholic, you should surely remember the mercy and love of Christ, Who said, 'Thou shall not kill,' and 'Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.'"

Kitty O'Brien did not tell me her answer to that. She did not argue with him, seeing his excitement, but tried to persuade him that the spirit of the Irish people was not murderous, but only determined to defend their liberty as a nation against all odds, and at whatever cost. She added, however, for his comfort, that she could blame no man who for conscience's sake stood on the other side.

"I can never go back to Ireland," he said. "Never!"

At those words, Kitty told me, tears swept into the man's eyes, and she felt sorry for him, and something of the love she had had for him came back. She found a nobility in him, in spite of his hostility to all her faith. She held out her hand to him, and said, "Desmond, I'm sorry for the thing that has come between us!"

Those words seemed to startle him.

"What is it that has come between us?" he asked sharply. "Do you know?"

She could not understand what he meant by that question, though, when she told me, I knew that he was thinking of the father of this girl, whom he had condemned to death as a rebel in Dublin.

"All this tragedy," she answered.

"It's Fate," he said. "We can't alter it, or dodge it. It hunts us down. It's the thread that runs right through our history, the thread of the Furies, in which we are caught like flies."

"You're ill," she told him. His haggard look touched her with pity, and he confessed that his nerve had gone.

For a moment there was silence between them. He took off his hat, gazing at her in a strange way, and then spoke sadly.

"Perhaps it's the last time we'll meet."

For the third time she held out her hand, but he did not take it, even then. But quickly he stooped and kissed it, and then, without another word, turned and walked out of the Barberini garden.

I met him later that day, in a quaint restaurant called the Ulpia, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Trajan's Forum. I think it must be the oldest restaurant in the world, or, rather, the oldest building used as such, for it is a Roman vault, and its naked brickwork in its semi-circular walls, with a domed roof, dates from the time of the first Cæsars. It is fitted up in the old Roman style, with little old lamps on the ledge round the wall, and tall earthenware amphoræ in a recess here and there, and big lamps in the centre of the tables on iron stands copied from those that were found in Pompeii. One may feed here as well as anywhere in Rome, and the place is always crowded with smart people from the Embassies and the big hotels. I was not surprised when I saw Whyte come in, and I beckoned him to the table where I sat close to the wall, at the far end of the semi-circle nearest to the door. He took a chair facing me, and we talked in a casual way about trivial things, but he said not a word of what must have been in his thoughts all the time—his meeting with Kitty O'Brien.

One remark he made amused me, but afterwards led to a nervous scare on my part.

"One has to be careful of one's conversation in this place; it's like a whispering-gallery. Something in the shape of the room and the nakedness of the walls make one's words carry in the queerest way to the other end. Listen now!"

I listened, with my ear close to the wall, and quite distinctly I heard a conversation between two men's voices, and caught sentences here and there as clearly as though they had been whispered in my ear. One man said, "Of course we shall have to do it quietly,"

and the other, after some words I did not make out, said, "I don't think he knows us by sight at all."

"They're speaking English," I told Whyte, and then looked round the restaurant to discover the speakers. I could see none but Italians, some French officers and their ladies, and some obvious Jews, until Whyte pointed out two young men at the far end of the room, close to the wall, as we were.

"That's the couple, I expect," he said, and then spoke of some other subject connected with the room and its frequenters. But I was interested in this trick of acoustics, and every now and then leaned back in my chair against the wall to listen to those far-away voices, and every time I heard a few words as though at the end of a telephone, though more softly. Many visitors to Rome have done the same, as they will remember. It was when I had tilted my chair back for one of those experiments that I heard one of the two voices mention Whyte's name. It was perfectly distinct. "Desmond Whyte"—and then the other voice said, "It's only justice."

I leaned over to Whyte, and whispered to him in French.

"Those men are speaking about you, old man. Do you know them at all?"

He glanced over to them and shook his head, and I saw that for a moment he was disconcerted—even afraid. He hid this by remarking carelessly that many people knew him in Rome, though he couldn't bother to remember them all; but I noticed that when we paid our bills and left the Ulpia, he walked quickly away from the place, and looked back twice to see if he were being followed. It was not so, and I saw him safely back to his house, and arranged to go with him next day to the catacombs of St. Calixtus, along the Appian Way, which I had not yet seen. I had the morning to spare, but in the afternoon my journalistic business was to be fulfilled by the interview with the Pope, which was timed for half-past three. There was plenty of time to do the catacombs and be back to change into evening dress, according to etiquette, and drive down to the Vatican.

I remember the beauty of that next morning when

in an old *carozza*, I drove out with Whyte through the crooked old streets below the Capitol where, in low vaulted rooms open to the roadway, Italian carpenters and sculptors worked, and tavern-keepers sold cheap, coarse wine out of enormous jars, and the mediæval spirit of the "Borgo" seemed to live still in this part of Rome. Then we drove past the Colosseum, and out of the gate of the Porta San Sebastiano and so past the church of Domine Quo Vadis, where, in the time of the Nero persecutions, Peter is said to have met the Master and asked him that question, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" and had the answer, "*Venio Romam iterum crucifigi*"—"I go to Rome to be crucified anew."

High grey walls on which lichen grew, rose on either side of us, enclosing vineyards, and the gardens of Roman villas, and the tombs of early Christian martyrs. Overhead the sky was one dome of deepest blue, and from the Appian Way—that old road of history down which Cæsar's legions tramped and the feet of many saints and heroes and cut-throats and barbarians—came puffs of white dust which powdered the Roman farm-carts with their coloured hoods, and ox-wagons crawling slowly by with loads of hay from the Campagna, and the brown-limbed urchins, like figures of Tanagra terra-cotta, running alongside to beg for pennies. So we came to the garden of the Trappists, who act as guides to the catacombs. There were already a few people waiting to go down to the underground galleries, and a motor-car full of visitors—four young men, with a priest next to the driver—came up as we arrived.

One of the monks greeted us in French, and then, finding we were English, changed to that tongue, which he spoke with an Irish brogue, slightly Italianised. To each of the visitors he handed a little taper which we lit from his own, coiled round a stick. As it happened, we were an English-speaking crowd, and the Trappist gathered us into one party, and bade us follow him to the steps which led into the catacombs. This is not the place to describe those tombs of the early Christians, who, for three hundred years of persecution, buried their dead here, and worshipped secretly at their altars, and kept their Christian faith burning in this

darkness with a love that was disdainful of the martyr's death, further back there, along the road, where the wild beasts waited for them—so many of them—in the cages of the Colosseum. I confess I was touched with the remembrance of these things, with the presence of that spirit down there where the Trappist monk lighted the tombs with his taper and showed us the drawings and writings on the wall by which the early Christians symbolised their faith, and those altars above their martyred bones. Others in our party were also stirred with emotion, and I noticed that the young priest with the party of men who had motored to the gates almost at the same time as ourselves, was moved to silent tears. He spoke to one of the men with him in a whisper, but I heard well enough to know that he was Irish. As we made our way through the gloomy galleries, and first one man spoke, and then another, it occurred to me that all the party was Irish, and yet it was not until a few moments before our coming up to the sunlight again, that a thought came to me which caused me great uneasiness. It was the face of one of the young men with the Irish priest which had put this thought into my head. I had seen him before, beyond any doubt. He was one of those two fellows in the Ulpia restaurant whose voices I had heard as they travelled round the walls, and who had spoken of Desmond Whyte.

I was almost the last man of the party who walked in single file up the steps leading to the monk's garden, and Desmond was ahead, close to the priest. I tried to press on, but could not pass those who lagged—deliberately, as it seemed to me—while they extinguished their tapers. The sunlight struck my eyes with a vivid and dazzling glare after the darkness, and then I saw Whyte standing among a group of men, with his back to the garden wall.

The Irish priest was speaking to him.

"I think it will be well, sir, if you go with these gentlemen without any show of violence. You see, they are in a sufficient number to make their will prevail, and they promise, on their honour, to give you a fair hearing."

Whyte spoke, and I heard his words clearly.

"The cruelty of men has not changed since Nero's time, and Christ is still mocked."

"You were the Nero," said one of the young men savagely.

The others closed round Whyte, but did not use any force to take him. They had no need to, for he walked quietly among them, holding his head high, with a proud look.

I called out to him.

"Whyte! What is it? For God's sake, old man——"

An elbow shoved me back against the wall.

"Keep out of this business," said a tall young fellow with shaggy black hair under a felt hat. He ran past me out of the garden so quickly that by the time I reached the gate he was standing on the step of the motor-car, which was already moving.

"Whyte!" I shouted.

I saw Whyte's hand raised above the felt hats of the men who were in the car with him. It was a farewell salute.

I jumped into the old *carozza* which had brought us to the catacombs, and shouted to the driver in vile Italian to drive quickly. But it was ridiculous. Before the old nag had got into its jog-trot, the motor-car had disappeared along the Via Appia in a cloud of white dust.

I was under no illusion as to Whyte's danger. These men, somehow or other, knew him as one of the officers of the court-martial that had sentenced Fergus O'Brien to death. They regarded that sentence as murder. They were going to try Whyte by the "justice" of Sinn Fein. It was the vicious circle that was working madness in Ireland, and Whyte's life was at the mercy of ruthless men who believed in vengeance rather than mercy in a case like his.

I drove back to Rome in a state of mental fever, cursing the slowness of that *carozza*, cursing the Irish, wondering what on earth I could do to save my friend. There was no trace of the motor-car along the Appian Way. Even its tracks were not visible in the white dust after the first few yards, for a trail of ox-waggons came along, stirring clouds and blotting out the light imprint of studded tyres.

I went round to the British Embassy and made a report. They took the matter seriously, got on to the telephone to the Italian police, sent out one of their own secret service agents, and said, "Poor old Whyte!" in tones that made me fear the worst.

I could do no more at that time. I was booked for that interview with the Holy Father from which there could be no excuse or delay. I remember the agony of getting into evening clothes, the usual battle with a refractory stud when one's fingers are all thumbs and one's nerves all rattled, the idiotic wrestlings with a dress-tie which went all cock-eyed and would not lie straight. At last I was in another *carozza*, driving across the Tiber past the Castello St. Angelo to the great Piazza of St. Peter's, while I tried to collect my thoughts and to forget Desmond Whyte awhile so that I could frame some of the questions which I wanted to ask the Pope. As I have said, that interview has nothing to do with the strange affair of Whyte, except in coincidence of time and something that happened at the end of it, when I passed down the Vatican steps again; but I remember now, as part of this narrative, the acute nervousness and the sense of tragedy with which I approached the palace of the Pope.

In the entrance-way the Swiss guards were lounging on the benches, the red, blue and yellow of their doublets and baggy breeches making a splash of colour against the white marble, while one of them, wearing a peaked helmet and carrying a long halberd, paraded up and down. He grounded his pike at my approach, and glanced at the card I had, authorising my private audience with the Holy Father, then saluted and bade me pass. I went up a long, winding flight of marble steps which have been swept by the gowns of many Popes and Cardinals since the days of Julius II, and came into a corridor where another halberdier stood on guard; then through anterooms which seemed to me interminable, all decorated with paintings by the great masters of the Italian Renaissance and all guarded by the Swiss soldiers of the papal court. My knees felt weak as I walked stiffly across the polished boards, answering the salutes of the officers who rose at my approach, and directed me to still another

room. At last I was bidden to wait, and presently a chamberlain came and said, "The Holy Father will see you." He opened a door, and on the threshold stood a tiny man in white, who was the Pope. . . .

Half an hour had passed before I came out with that "interview" which was to go across all the wires of the world, but I was not so much excited by that journalistic luck—it is not every man who interviews a Pope!—as by the frightful thought that Desmond Whyte was perhaps already dead.

I went quickly down the great flight of steps, and then at the bottom I saw Kitty O'Brien. She was standing in a splash of sunlight beyond the portico, talking to an old Cardinal, who was laughing with her. Regardless of all etiquette, I went up to her quickly, and said, "I must speak to you."

"Young man," said the Cardinal, not severely, "where are your manners?"

"Forgive me, sir," I answered. "It is a matter of life or death."

He lifted his tasselled hat, and answered gravely, "That is serious indeed," and then moved away.

"Kitty," I said, "for God's sake help me. Desmond Whyte, who was your friend and mine, is in the most dreadful danger."

She raised her eyebrows, and the laughter left her eyes. "In what way?"

I told her hurriedly of that visit to the catacombs, of Whyte's encounter with the Irish priest and other men, of their words to him, and of his forced departure in the motor-car.

She was silent for a moment, and I saw the colour ebb from her cheeks.

"Yes," she said, "it looks serious."

She asked me to describe the men—above all, the priest. He was easy to remember, as I told her—a young man with black eyes, very piercing and full of light, and a little scar close to his lip, on the left side of his face.

She started when I mentioned that scar, and I saw that she knew the man.

"Let's go," she commanded. "Get that car over there."

There was a waiting taxi in the great square, and I hailed it.

"Where do we go?" I asked, when Kitty had taken her seat in it. She did not answer, but called out to the driver some name in Italian, and presently I saw that we were going down the Via Appia again. But not very far. We stopped not far away from the Porta San Sebastiano, by a little house at the end of a walled garden.

Before we stopped, I spoke to Kitty O'Brien, and told her something which I knew would be worse than a blow to her.

"You ought to know the full story. Whyte was one of the officers of the court-martial which condemned your father."

She stared at me so strangely, with such a look of horror, that I was frightened—for Whyte's sake and for hers.

"He did what he thought was his duty," I said. "For Heaven's sake be merciful, if your mercy can help him."

"God have mercy on all of us," she said.

I think she was near fainting for a moment or two, and swayed a little when she stepped down from the car into the hot glare of sunlight.

"Shall I come with you?" I asked.

She looked down into the white dust as though she saw words written there. Presently she raised her head, and said:

"Wait for me. I'll go alone."

She pulled at a bell-rope by the door, and I heard the bell jangle. At least a minute passed before the door was opened in the wall.

I heard a voice speak in English.

"Who are you?"

"It's Kitty O'Brien."

"For the love of God!"

The door was opened wider, and Kitty passed inside, and the door was shut again.

By my watch it was an hour and ten minutes before the little door in the hall was opened again.

It was not Kitty O'Brien who came out, but Desmond Whyte. He was as white as a ghost, but when he saw

me standing by the side of the car, he grasped me by the arm and said, "Thanks, old man!"

"Do we wait for Kitty?" I asked, trying to steady my voice, and failing. I was in a hurry to get away from that damned little door which I had been watching for an hour with the knowledge that somewhere beyond it, in that grey house whose chimney I could see above the wall, this friend of mine was being tried for his life, and that it hung not upon justice, but on the balance between mercy and vengeance in a woman's heart.

"No," said Desmond. "She orders us to drive back at once. She will follow later."

He took his seat in the car, and lit a cigarette with a hand that trembled a little, but not much.

As we drove back to Rome he took off his hat and let the light evening breeze play about his forehead.

"Can you tell me anything?" I asked, breaking his silence.

"I can tell you nothing," he said, gravely, "except that you were just in time to save my life."

"Nothing more? Nothing of the scene inside that house?"

"Nothing. I'm pledged to that."

He then added a sentence which was the last he ever spoke about that episode.

"I can tell you this, old man. In spite of all the devilry of life—the bloody cruelty of men—there's still a little mercy in the heart of women here and there. And that's our only hope."

Whyte left Rome next day, and I never saw him again. He died of pleurisy in Paris. And now that so many dreadful things have happened, and are happening, in Ireland, I think often of this tragedy as symbolical of the conflict between two ideals which have divided a heroic race, killed good love between men and women, hardened the spirit of England against her Celtic sister, and led to anarchy and outrage—on both sides, alas!—which must make the angels weep, if they are not tired of tears because of man's stupidity.

THROUGH ENCHANTED SEAS

THROUGH ENCHANTED SEAS

At Brindisi, on the heel of Italy, a steamer of 7,000 tons, once Austrian and now flying the Italian flag, took on board a motley crowd of passengers speaking many languages—English, French, Italian, German, Greek, Turkish, Russian—and of no clear-cut nationality. Some of them were Jews, unmistakably, travelling eastwards to mend the threads of their international commerce, broken for a time by war; others were Greek and Armenian merchants. Others were Turks, Westernised and not Oriental in their look until they put on the fez, as I was startled to see at the journey's end, when they stepped ashore at Constantinople.

Many steamers had put into Brindisi, from Trieste, Athens, Venice, and one from Bombay which disgorged a crowd of English folk in pith helmets and with pipes in their mouths, who strolled about the quayside while their ship unloaded some of its merchandise. They mingled with herds of goats, following the music of jangling bells, and stared at the Italian stevedores, who were yelling and cursing with their usual eloquence between spells of activity over wine-casks and orange-boxes.

Then three blasts of a siren wailed up the flight of steps where once Anthony came in search of Brutus, who fled too quickly for him and escaped by death. The last Jew had come aboard. The goat bells sounded faintly as the steamer turned very slowly to the harbour mouth, passed an old fortress there—a watch-tower for the Moorish pirates who used to raid this coast—and so to the enchanted sea of the Ionian Isles. So on a voyage back again to that world of dreams out of which the first myths of history came, when men were heroes and heroes gods, and where each peak and valley and cove in the high mountains that rise out of these blue waters is haunted by world-old memories.

The Ionian Sea, merging into the Adriatic, was so calm that when our ship divided its water, leaving behind a long furrow, the side of each wave was like a polished jewel, and reflected the patches of snow still on the mountain crests and the fissures in the rocks. It was unbroken by any ripple except where the boat stirred its quietude by a long ruffle of feathers, and it was so blue, so darkly blue, that it seemed as though one's hand would be dyed like a potter's to the same colour if one dipped it in. With this sea, and this sky above, we went on travelling through a blue world, except where one's eyes wandered into the gorges of those mountains along the coast of Old Illyria, where the barren rocks are scarred and gleam white, or when they were touched by the sun's rays at dawn or sunset and glittered in a golden way, or became washed with rose-water, or all drenched in mist as purple as the Imperial mantle which once fell across them. Sometimes, quite suddenly, the sky which had been cloudless was crowded with white cloud mountains, piled like Pelion on Ossa (not far away) above the substantial hills; and long curly feathers, like those of the winged Victory of Samothrace, stretched above the ship. Now and then something came up out of the water with a splash of glittering drops. Surely they were dolphins, like those merry fish upon which the Cupids ride in the wall paintings of Pompeii! All day long the ship was followed by a flight of sea-gulls, skimming on quiet wings and calling plaintively, so that one heard again the sirens who cried to Ulysses, as he sailed this way through the Enchanted Seas. These old stories came back to me, as youth comes back among the Ionian Isles. . . .

Before leaving Brindisi I turned to look at some of the new passengers with that instinctive, foolish resentment which one always feels for the newcomers when one has joined a ship earlier in the voyage. Three of them had planted their deck chairs next to mine, forward of the smoke stack, but at a slight angle to face the sun, so that I could stare at them through half-closed eyes without impertinence. One of them was worth staring at with the homage any man should give to a pretty woman unless he is blind to beauty, and her immediate

companion, a girl of ten or so, who looked like her sister, attracted one's sympathy at first glance because of the crutches by her side and the transparent look of a child who has had Pain for her bedmate. I had seen them both come on board as I looked over the side of the ship at Brindisi. The crippled girl had walked to the edge of the gangway with her crutches, and then had looked up, helplessly, at the big vessel. I heard the elder girl speak to her in French:

"Can you manage, Mignonne?"

"If you will hold my crutches," answered the child.

"I will carry you," said a man who was with them and who now sat next to them on the ship.

"No," said the child, "I don't want you to carry me."

It seemed to me that she spoke those words petulantly, even with a tone of childish anger in her voice, as I listened to this conversation from the lower deck of the boat by the quayside at Brindisi.

"Nonsense!" said the man. He was a tall, well-made fellow in a loose grey suit which gave him an English look, though his bronzed face, with a little black moustache, looked more French than English. The girl seemed to grip her crutches so that he should not take them from her, but laughingly, with an air of mastery, he lifted her up in his arms and carried her up the gangway, and did not put her down until he laid her in the deck chair.

"I told you not to carry me," said the girl; "and you hurt me."

The man laughed—I was not sure now of his nationality, though he spoke French perfectly—and shrugged his shoulders.

"It is often necessary to hurt people for their own good."

"Is that a Turkish proverb?" asked the child.

"It is the Turkish way, little sister," said the man.

He went to the gangway again and met the elder girl—a tall, slim thing—who gave her hand to him, and it seemed to me curious that at that moment, which was not a meeting after long absence—he had only left her half a minute—he should raise her hand to his lips.

The tall girl seemed to deprecate this action with a

touch of impatience, but I could not hear what she said to him then. It was afterwards that she came to sit by the side of the crippled child, who greeted her with a smile of adoration—so different to the fierce little look which she had darted at the man who had carried her on board—and stroked her companion's hand, which she drew on to her lap.

"It will be a beautiful voyage," said the elder girl, looking out to sea, so blue and glittering in the morning sunlight.

"With a joyful ending," said the man, bending towards her a little and speaking low, yet not too low for me to hear him from my chair.

"My family will be glad, Hadji," said the girl, and then she shivered a little and pulled a sable tippet closer to her neck as though a cold wind had touched her, though it was very warm on deck with no bite in the soft breeze of the Adriatic.

"And mine will be filled with joy," said the man.

He tried to take her hand again, but the crippled child drew it closer to her, and I saw her eyes meet the man's eyes with a look of dislike.

So the man was a Turk, judging by that name Hadji which the tall girl had called him; and she, I guessed, was a Russian, by something of the Slav in her broad forehead and grey eyes, though her face was more delicately moulded than the usual Slav type, with a finer profile and more sensitive mouth than other women of her race on the ship. A Turk!—well, in a dozen guesses I should not have hit on that. He had not the sleek and oily look of the Westernised Ottoman, who in Paris or Vienna puts by the fez as well as the faith of Islam, learns to speak French or German with a perfect accent, and adopts the habits and vices of the boulevard and the biergarten. Nor had he the crafty eyes and veiled insolence of the Turkish official whom one meets first in the Custom House of Constantinople, bullying the bagmen of all nations until he is adequately bribed. This man was a good type in his way, cut on clean, hard lines, with a soldierly figure and bearing, and the look of a French officer of Zouaves, burnt by the sun of Morocco, or perhaps more like an Italian gentleman with a touch

of the old Roman blood. He wore his clothes well, spoke French like his native tongue, and had the easy manners of a man used to good company and sure of his place in it.

"The fellow has the mouth of a Spanish mule," said the second officer of the ship, who used to make breezy comments on the passengers in spare moments between his watches.

"Meaning what?" I asked, and he answered:

"Meaning a hard kick for anybody who stands behind his heels."

That remark was made when we were two days out from Brindisi and lying off the island of Corfu, by which time I was taking a particular interest in the characters of various passengers on board, and especially of these three—in the idle way one does on a sea voyage, when, between eating, sleeping, skimming through a light novel, and watching the play of light and colour on the sea, one studies the drama of life as one finds it, or guesses at it, among the people who sit on the same deck, feed in the same saloon, and make passing friendships with an intimacy which ends abruptly as a rule when the baggage is lowered on the quayside.

Certainly this ship was crowded with human drama enough to fill a hundred novels if one could only get the stories of this stange conglomeration of races and types. The lower deck itself was a stage thronged with an astonishing diversity of characters, and I often looked down on them from the boat deck, which was usually deserted so that I was alone there, with a sense of wonderment. What strange chapters of history had brought them together as shipmates? There was a group of Italian soldiers going out through those seas—which had been swept by the galleys of their ancestors when Rome claimed the Empire of the East and West—to join the international garrison of Constantinople now held as a hostage for the Turkish peace. They were sleeping or playing cards on the hatchways; or stripped themselves to the waist, and washed their shirts and spread them in the sun, and wrestled with each other like schoolboys; and then, as the sun was setting, gathered round one of their comrades, who strummed a guitar, and sang old songs of Italy with sad little refrains

and strange haunting cadences which seemed to have come down to them from ancient times, so that the spirit of an old, old race was in them, sounding again over this sea of enchantment where many ghost ships sail and where the world's youth was born. So they sang until they were in darkness, except for a galaxy of stars above them, and the ship's light on the mast, and the glow of a cigarette revealing a swarthy face here and there.

Separate from them all day long sat a number of Albanians, in loose white breeches tied round with coloured sashes, and on another patch of deck were two old Turks squatting on a pile of rugs, which I guessed they were taking back to the markets of Stamboul. One figure was strangely solitary—an old Arab woman, huddled up in a dirty white garment, who, hour after hour and day after day, stared over the ship's side at the mirror of the sea as though reading there, like some old Sibil, the future of fate. What thread of life was drawing this old woman to the city of the Sultan?

Aloof from the Italians and the Albanians and the Turks, another group of people were encamped on the deck. Armenians, I was told by the second officer, who grinned down at one girl among them—a restless creature as I had noticed, walking up and down, up and down, all day long, like a young tigress in a cage.

"Poor trash, most of them," he said, "but that girl is a peach. Too good to last long down the Grand 'Rue of Pera, on the bad side of Constant."

She had a leather pocket-book strapped to her side, containing no doubt all her little fortune, whatever it might be, and I noticed that she gave no answering smiles to the Italian soldiers who tried to entice her into friendly conversation, and that always she stopped short of the two old Turks squatting on their rugs. Several times she glanced up to the upper deck, and several times I met her roving eyes, big, black, gloomy eyes, and found a look of tragedy in them which made me wish to know more of her history. She was certainly beautiful in spite of the pallor of her face, which reminded me of a Greek head—of Niobe—which I had seen in the museum of Naples.

The first-class passengers seemed to me on the whole a bad crowd, with a few exceptions. They were commercial travellers of many races, speaking many languages with equal facility, and English with a strong American accent. In the hold they had cases full of boots and goloshes, woollen underclothing, samples of manufactured articles of all kinds, which American and English factories were anxious to push on to the Turk as surplus stocks left over from the war boom. These men over-ate themselves in the dining-saloon, and slept on deck between meals, untouched by the beauty of sea and sky and of the Greek islands through which we threaded our way, so green where vineyards and olive trees climbed up steep cliffs to the heights of naked rock, with deep fissures, in which black shadows lay, but white and gleaming, or yellow as beaten gold, where the sunshine swept their polished walls.

The conversation of these commercial men was always of money. Over the saloon tables their noses met and they talked of foreign exchanges in lire, drachmas, kronen, marks, francs, dollars, pounds, with unceasing interest. The Greeks carried amber necklaces, and as they talked, or as they sat on deck meditating over the money markets, fumbled and fiddled with the amber beads with fat, restless fingers, interminably. At night when the Italians were singing their folk songs, and the sky was strewn with a golden dust of stars, and the sea, still darkly blue, was on fire at the wake with phosphorescent light, they crowded into the smoking-room and gambled at "Bridge," with glasses of whisky at their elbows and a greedy light in their eyes.

Some of them had brought their women with them, voluptuous Jewesses, plump Greeks, a German frau or two, and here and there was an unaccompanied lady of uncertain race with dyed hair and thickly powdered face and coy ways which she practised upon the commercial gentlemen, who responded with a coarse gallantry. An unpleasant crowd, I thought, though not without interest as a study of the vulture type of human nature.

Cleaner, more attractive, good to know, were other types mingled with them, but aloof from them—two American nurses, who looked around for any babies

on board and found two little English girls whom they mothered for the voyage and to whom they told fairy tales with a joyful sense of humour which kept the children laughing, or wide-eyed with wonder; a young French officer, who played Chopin on a piano with several broken notes which he dodged with skill; several other officers of the Bersaglieri, who quarrelled, laughed, and danced with each other, with a boyishness which was good to see after the years of war: and most interesting to me, because of my friendship with him and because of what happened on the ship, young Hallam Scott, on his way to Constantinople as Intelligence Officer with the British mission.

This boy came on board at Piræus, the port of Athens. Although our ship lay to outside for six hours no passengers were allowed to land unless they were staying in Greece—some red-tape order of the Greek Government or some nervousness about Royalist plots against Venizelos. I was annoyed like others on board, because I wanted to see Athens, but I made the best of it by getting out my field-glasses, through which very clearly I could see the ruins of the Parthenon, shining white above the old hill of the Acropolis. I pointed them out to the little girl with crutches, with whom by this time I was on friendly terms, so that I knew her name was Anna Kuropatkine, and that her elder sister was Katrina, and that her father was a Russian General who had escaped to Constantinople with the last of Denikin's Army and with her mother, another sister, and a soldier brother, utterly ruined except for a few diamonds which they sold in Pera to provide means of life.

Anna and Katrina were going to join them, having been in Paris throughout the war, and never believing until recent weeks that they would ever see their parents again. They, too, had been very poor, and would have starved but for good friends and Katrina's water-colour drawings which sometimes she sold to the French dealers. Now Katrina would be very rich, enormously rich, because she was going to marry a Turk who had a palace in Constantinople and a villa on an island called Prinkipo and other houses in Asia, at Broussa and Angora. The Turk's name was Hadji Damad Bey—Bey meant sir

or lord—and Anna, this child with crutches, hated the idea of it because she hated all Turks, and this one more than all, and loved her sister better than anyone in the world.

All that was told me with childish gravity, spoken in beautiful French, as we sat together on the boat deck to which the child had climbed painfully with her crutches. I had tried to check her confidences, not wishing to learn so much private history by a child's indiscretions, but she told me that she trusted me and liked to tell me what was so much on her heart—this fear of Katrina's marriage with a Turk. . . . A strange little tale, which made me feel a personal and inquisitive interest in the development of its plot between the Turk and that beautiful Russian girl—she was certainly charming in her nervous and sensitive personality, so delicate and spiritual compared with some of the plump Greek women and the full-lipped ladies who made so much noise up and down the decks. Curiously, I too disliked the idea of that coming marriage of hers with the Turk. It was no business of mine, but instinctively I was in alliance with the little sister in her objection to this mating with Islam.

These two—Hadji Damad Bey and Katrina Kuropatkine—stood together now on the lower deck, below where I stayed with little Anna, looking over the side of the vessel at the hubbub of small craft swarming about us. The Greek boatmen, who had come out like midges from Piræus Harbour, were waiting until the military police had examined passports aboard and given permission for those passengers who were bound for Athens to leave the ship. Standing up in their narrow skiffs they touted for customers, shouting, "Kyrie! Kyrie!" to any likely-looking man who wore a hat and had a land-going air. Others, already in possession of baggage lowered over the ship's side, maintained their right to it in the name of the Madonna and all saints against claimants, passionate and blasphemous in their assertion of priority. A hundred pairs of arms waved above the boats, brown hands spoke the full rich language of gesticulation, the oars of late-coming boats ruffled the blue water into white feathers, and the sun of Greece poured down upon a scene which must have happened in this harbour, with this shouting, this whirl of arms,

this excitement of brown faces and burning eyes, when the Greek traders put into Piræus three thousand years ago, or when the Venetian galleons came in later history.

It was a late-coming boat which cleft a way into the centre of all the small craft, and an English officer, who was Hallam Scott, sitting forward, pushed the noses of the other boats aside to make a channel close to the side of our towering ship. I did not recognise him until he was up the gangway, and indeed, to my surprise, his name was spoken first by the child Anna, standing beside me. She leaned forward, looking down with sudden excitement, and said in French, which she always spoke to me:

"*O, quelle chance! C'est le capitaine Scott!*"

Then I saw old Hallam, as I called him, beautifully bronzed, leaner than I had seen him last, with the same look of shyness and gravity which made his character an open book, and the limp of his old wound.

"You know him?" I asked Anna, and she told me that he had been their best friend in Paris: so very kind to them that they could never forget his goodness, and so fond of Katrina, that she, Anna, had hoped, and even prayed sometimes, that he would ask Katrina to be his wife. Now it was too late. Such a pity! Katrina was going to marry Hadji Damad Bey when the ship arrived at Constantinople.

"Katrina has seen him," said the child. "Look!"

I looked from our boat deck to the lower deck just below, and saw Katrina Kuropatkine make a quick movement from the side of Hadji Bey and turn her head sharply so that she could see the man who had just come aboard. A warm colour swept into her face, and there was a look of joyful surprise, a kind of eagerness in her attitude, as though she meant to push her way through the little crowd about her to greet this newcomer. But Hadji Bey touched her on the arm and spoke to her, and instantly the glad look left her face, and she seemed to draw back in her soul as well as in her body. Or did I imagine all that, letting a sense of romance get the better of me—a sense of romance which comes easily to any mind on a ship that goes slowly through the Isles of Greece on a blue sea under a blue sky, with Italian songs at the prow and pretty women aboard?

Anna danced about a little on her crutches and called out to her friend in a shrill voice, dropping the "h" of his name in the French way.

"'Allam! 'Allam!"

He had not seen Katrina Kuropatkine, of whom he was so "fond" if the child was right, but now, at the sound of his name called shrill from the boat deck, he looked up, and seeing Anna, opened his eyes wide with surprise and then gave a shout.

"Good lord! Little Anna!"

He was up on the boat deck before one could say "knife," as he would have said, and Anna had her arms about him, kissing him and babbling French nineteen to the dozen, to tell him how glad she was to see her friend again, and how Katrina would be glad.

He drew back from her, still holding her hands, her thin transparent little hands, and:

"Katrina is here, too? Why, of course she is! What superlative luck!"

I hoped the child would not tell him there and then that Katrina Kuropatkine had a Turk with her whom she was going to marry. I don't like to see a man get a blow in the face when Fate seems friendly to him.

"Hullo, Hallam!" I said; "here is another friend of yours. You seem to know every passenger aboard this ship!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

He gripped my hand hard and tight in his old way.

"Searching for trouble in Constantinople?"

We had not seen each other for three years—three years of crowded history—but spoke as most English do, as though we had met a week ago. Then on to the boat deck came Katrina Kuropatkine and Hadji Damad Bey. . . . I saw Hallam get his blow in the face.

It came almost at once. Katrina Kuropatkine slipped forward a little to him with her hand outstretched. She was smiling, but her face was quite white.

"How good to see you again, my friend!" she said in French. He took her hand and put it to his lips in the Russian way, and said "Katrina!" very low. The blow had not come yet.

Hadji Damad Bey came forward, smiling too, but

with what seemed to me a trace of uneasiness. He took the arm of Katrina Kuropatkine, as though she belonged to him, and spoke to her,

"Introduce me to your friend, my dear one."

Katrina Kuropatkine spoke his name, and I could see that she was troubled.

The Turk lifted his hat and held out his hand to Hallam. "I am delighted to meet an old friend of my *fiancée*. She has spoken to me about you, Captain Scott—of your great kindness."

The blow had come full and square out of the blue sky, and I saw Hallam Scott take it like a gentleman. A slight pallor crept under the bronze of his face and there was just a little stiffening of his body. He lifted his hat and took the hand of Hadji Damad Bey.

"How do you do?" he said in English.

He turned to Katrina Kuropatkine, who lowered her eyes before his—was it shame or shyness?—and spoke to her easily.

"You must have had a beautiful voyage so far. The sea is wonderful."

Then he turned to Anna and touched her cheek.

"You are getting as brown as a gipsy. By the time you get to Constantinople you will be strong and well."

"I never want to get to Constantinople," said the child. "I should like to go sailing on for ever and ever on this blue sea, with you and Katrina, and this new friend of mine"—she pointed to me—"and no one else in the world."

Hadji Damad Bey laughed at this speech.

"I must claim a place in the boat, little sister! Nor would Katrina and I like such an endless voyage. Happiness waits for us at the journey's end, by the grace of Allah."

It was by a slip that he spoke the name of Allah, and he corrected it instantly, altering it in French to "the grace of God."

"Yet," said Katrina Kuropatkine, with a laugh which did not come quite easily, I thought, "there is something to be said for a voyage which has no ending, through beauty like this, with friends, who ask no more than friendship, on a happy ship."

"Friendship is not enough for ever," said Hadji Damad Bey. "What do you think, Captain Scott?"

He smiled, and showed white teeth under his little black moustache—a fine figure of a man.

Scott said in his English way, though all the talk was in French:

"I'm not a philosopher. I'm not good at abstract ideas."

Then he laughed and squared his shoulders.

"I must go and unpack. Shall we meet at dinner?"

He lifted his hat to Katrina Kuropatkine, patted the hand of Anna, and disappeared down the gangway.

I followed him to my own cabin and stood staring out of the porthole as the ship was tugged out of the harbour of Piræus and then made for the open sea. A ship of drama, with queer emotions on board and tangled threads of life. Strange that Hallam Scott of all men should have crossed the threads of the little plot which I had been watching between that Russian girl and the good-looking Turk in idle moments on sun-swept decks. What a clash of race as well as of hearts! Russian, Moslem, English, with French as their link of speech. I could see tragedy ahead for that girl Katrina Kuropatkine. The Turk was a handsome fellow, and perhaps had touched her passion, but, if I could read her face, Hallam Scott was her man—her heart's mate.

Yet she was pledged to the Turk! Why, in the name of womanhood? Easy to guess. Too easy as a riddle. Her family was out on the other side of ruin, with the precipice ahead of them, away there in Constantinople. She herself had hung on to life in Paris by dabs of paint on bits of cartridge paper, no secure charter of right for the daughter of a Russian General. She had kept Anna, the cripple child, out of a thin little purse, sometimes empty. Hadji Damad Bey had a place in Constantinople, a villa at Prinkipo, houses and caravans in Asia. He would be a good protector of a Russian family ruined in evolution. No more need to paint on tambourines to pay the doctor's fee for little Anna. And Hadji Damad Bey was a fine figure of a man, a gentleman, Turk only by name, and in intellect and education as Western as any Frenchman. Hallam

Scott, "le capitaine Scott," was a poor young man, a good friend, nothing more. So easy to guess all that. . . . Then I turned away from the porthole and laughed aloud in my little cabin. What an incurable romantic I was in spite of five years of war! Perhaps I was dead wrong. Quite likely that old Hallam did not care two pins whether Katrina Kuropatkine married a Turk or a heathen Chinee. Perhaps he was engaged to a little girl in Kensington. And, anyhow, what had it got to do with me?

On deck I lay back in my chair and read Pierre Loti's "Désenchantées," and watched the slowly-moving panorama of the Greek coast, stirred with vague old memories from schoolboy days of Attica and Arcady and Bœtia, stretching away there now beyond the mountains as when the gods and goddesses played on these hill-tops, and Pan went piping through these groves followed by the dancing nymphs, and Ulysses sailed with his heroes along this shore. The poetry of the world came from this land and this sea when beauty dwelt there, as it dwells there now, unchanged and unchanging, though the spirit of the Greek people is dead or sleeping.

Little Anna had left me for her older friend, Hallam Scott, on the deck below, and I was alone until—later that day—against my will, Hadji Damad Bey interrupted my reading and my thoughts by a deliberate effort to get into conversation with me.

I think he was curious to know my business in Constantinople, and though he did not ask directly, he put leading questions to draw me out, which I dodged easily enough. Was he suspicious of me for some reason? It seemed to me that he had a look of curiosity more than the ordinary inquisitiveness of a fellow passenger. He seemed relieved when I told him that I was not a member of the British mission nor in any way connected with the Diplomatic Service. He spoke of Constantinople with enthusiasm for its natural beauty, but was contemptuous of the European quarter at Pera, with its cheap imitation of Parisian fashions, its tawdry shops, and its vicious life.

"You will like Stamboul better," he said. "There

you will see Turkish life in its simplicity and virtue. The women still go veiled for the most part, scornful of the fast creatures who flaunt their painted faces in the Grand' Rue of Pera. The Turkish men still listen to the voice of the *imam* when he calls to prayer from the minaret, and in the glorious mosques of Stamboul, in the spacious dome of Suleyman, or in the quietude of the Yeni Valideh, the golden letters of the Koran proclaim to every honest Turk the greatness of the Prophet who spread the faith of Islam throughout the world."

He spoke with a gravity which seemed to me sincere, and I was puzzled at this tribute to the spirit of Islam by a man who wore no fez, who was perfectly European in his manner and way of speech, and who was betrothed to a Russian and Christian girl.

"You believe in women going veiled?" I asked, going back to one part of his speech.

"I believe in women being virtuous," he answered with a smile. "Turkish women who abandon their old traditions lose, as a rule, all the restraints that made them faithful to their husbands and to their own honour. I am also enough of a Turk—though a liberal one—to shrink from women, like some of these on board"—he made a sweeping gesture towards the reading-saloon—"who are shameless in their frivolity with strange men."

He changed the conversation abruptly by alluding to the harsh terms of peace which the Allies intended to impose on Turkey, and said that if the spirit of Islam were stirred to fanaticism it would be dangerous for the British Empire. It seemed to me then that he was trying to do a little propaganda work at my expense—he imagined, perhaps, in spite of my disclaimer, that I was a man of public influence in world affairs—and I did not give him much encouragement. I thought more of what he had said about Turkish and European women, and I could not help wondering what kind of life awaited Katrina Kuropatkine if ever she entered one of his Turkish houses as a wife.

That evening I saw the Turk in him—the soul of the Turk—more nakedly: the Moslem jealousy of a modern Othello who sees his woman bestowing her charm upon other men without his sanction.

The French officer who was skilful at dodging the broken notes on the ship's piano played some dance music in the small saloon, and one or two couples took advantage of it by dancing on the deck outside. Hallam Scott was sitting by little Anna just inside the doorway of the saloon entrance, and Katrina Kuropatkine was in the saloon itself sitting in a low chair, with her pointed chin dug deep in the palm of her hands and her grey eyes fixed on the pianist, though she saw beyond him in some flight of thought.

"Dance with Katrina," said Anna to Hallam Scott, and after a moment's hesitation he laughed a little and said:

"Why not?"

He dodged a dancing couple, a young Greek and his lady, and went across to Katrina Kuropatkine. She looked at him with a sudden light in her eyes, and rose instantly, and offered him her arms. They held each other closely, and as they danced, very gracefully, with an intimate understanding of each other's steps, not learnt suddenly, it is certain, neither of them, I am sure, gave a thought to a man who stood watching them from the doorway.

It was Hadji Damad Bey. He stood very still and straight, clasping the lapels of his dinner-jacket, and I saw the fine line of his profile against the light as he stared sideways into the room. He was utterly unaware of my presence close to him: so close that I could see a sweat break out suddenly on his high forehead. The lines of his face altered imperceptibly. I looked at a man who had a devil in his soul, with an evil anger burning in his eyes. A flush of blood under the skin darkened the bronze of his face.

As Katrina Kuropatkine came dancing with Hallam Scott towards the doorway again, Hadji Damad Bey took a step forward and grasped her by the wrist, bringing her to a dead halt.

"I must beg of you," he said, coldly and quietly, "not to dance any more in front of all these people who are watching you. It displeases me intensely."

Katrina Kuropatkine looked at him with surprise, and then with an expression of resentment which gave

her a very proud and steely glance. The Russian blood in her was fired.

"It displeases me to be stopped in my dance," she said. "You have no right, Hadji Bey . . . Not yet."

There was something tragic, I thought in that "Not yet." It came at the end of her sentence like a sinister remembrance.

Hallam Scott, who like every Englishman hates a "scene" (and though the conversation was not loud it had attracted notice so that the French officer had stopped playing and was looking round from his stool), eased the situation by a good-mannered word or two.

"It is too hot to dance, anyhow. Let us go on deck."

Katrina Kuropatkine spoke to the French officer.

"*Jouez, je vous en prie,*" she said. "Play again."

Then she turned to Hallam Scott and spoke with a curious catch in her breath.

"We will finish our dance, my friend."

"Certainly," said Hallam, but more sheepishly than I should have liked.

They went on dancing for several minutes, and Katrina Kuropatkine had her head held back. Her face was white and her eyes angry. Not so angry as those of Hadji Damad Bey. He turned straight on his heel and went out on deck, and as he passed I saw that the devil was in possession of him. He did a curious thing which startled me. There was a liqueur glass standing on a rack by the entrance way, and he knocked it to the deck floor deliberately, and trod on it with his heel so that it was ground to splinters. A steward, standing by, muttered an oath of surprise, and then, as I saw, fetched a dustpan and broom and swept up the glass. . . . Later that night Hadji Damad Bey seemed to have got the better of his temper and to have made amends for his interruption, for when he said good night to Katrina Kuropatkine he kissed her hand very tenderly and said something which made her laugh, without vexation. Hallam Scott had disappeared, probably into the wireless room on the boat deck, where he seemed to spend a good deal of his time with the Italian operator, for some reason unknown to me then, though afterwards I knew.

It was next day, I think, as we were threading our

way through the Archipelago and drawing near to Lemnos—Sappho's isle of Lesbos, now known as Mytilene, lay dimly outlined between sea and sky on our port side, and beyond, invisible except as a far-off purple line like a low-lying cloud, the coast of Asia—that I went among the second-class passengers and heard a tale from one of them which lifted the veil from what to me was the mysterious life of the peoples in Asia Minor during five years of untold history—Armenians, Greeks, Turks, Circassians, Kurds, Lazis, and other races and tribes under Ottoman rule whose names I hardly knew, or not at all.

It was the Armenian girl whom I had seen pacing the deck so restlessly, with a wallet strapped about her, who told me something of all this by her own tale of tragedy, and it was the second officer of the ship who put me in the way of hearing it. At the time there seemed no link between her plot of life and that little drama of human interest which I was watching on the first-class decks with a Turkish gentleman, a Russian girl, and an English officer, my friend, as the characters. This Armenian beauty, with her black brooding eyes and her tigress slouch, up and down, up and down, among the Italian soldiers and the Albanians and Turks of the steerage crowd, had no point of contact in destiny with those other people one gangway higher in this ship of strange companions—or so one would have guessed. And yet really, as it turned out afterwards, the story I heard from her lips in strangely spoken French was part of a thread being woven by those hags who—in the old Greek mythology which comes back to one's mind if one goes voyaging amid the Isles of Greece—spin the fate assigned by the immortal gods to every human being, and among them Hallam Scott and Katrina Kuropatkine and Hadji Damad Bey.

"You know that Armenian lass?" said the second officer. "I mean the one with eyes like black pearls, on the second-class deck. She has a bunch of photographs which would make the Chamber of Horrors in Madame Tussaud's look like a girl's boudoir. Come and have a look at them."

"Rather not," I said. "I'm not keen on horrors."

"It's a duty," said the second officer, more gravely

than his usual way of speech. "We don't believe these things, but there's the proof of them, staring you in the face."

"What things?" I asked, and he said they proved the massacres of Armenians by the Turks during the European war, when all the Greek and Armenian communities on the coast of Asia Minor and in scores of towns were deported to the interior and largely wiped out by deliberate cruelty, murder and disease.

"That girl escaped out of absolute hell," said the second officer. "It makes me feel as though I could cut the throat of any Turk who comes my way."

"Well, there will be plenty of chances in Constantinople," I remarked. "Don't begin in the ship."

"Anyhow," said the ship's officer, "come and talk to the girl. It's a pleasure to see the bonfires in her eyes—fairly blazing—apart from her yarn."

The Armenian girl was a little hostile at first, down there between the hatchways, when the officer introduced me in his breezy way and said:

"This gentleman would like to see your peep-show, my dear—the photographs, I mean—and to hear the tale of your journey in the mountains."

"I do not show them to amuse strangers," she said. "They are only for people who would know the truth and help to punish the criminals."

"My friend is a lion for truth," said the ship's officer, winking at me.

I shrank from seeing her photographs, and indeed did not study them very carefully, because of their beastliness. They were photographs which this girl had got from a German officer—of Armenian women and children lying dead in heaps, of Turkish soldiers sitting among piles of skulls, of naked and murdered children in the ruins of looted villages. Once the girl pointed to a figure and said, "This is my mother"; and at another time she said, "This is my little brother, on the road which leads from Samsoun."

One photograph I took from her hand and looked at closely. It showed a Turkish officer sitting on a pile of stones and smoking a cigarette, close to the bodies of some dead women.

"Do you know this man's name?" I asked, and she answered:

"Hadji Damad Bey. He was a devil."

She did not tell me in what way he was a devil, but I knew that she thought him one of the men who had ordered the things which had happened to her people and to herself. Sitting there on one of the hatchways, in a night of stars, with the bright light at our masthead, and darkness about us, and the dark blue sea luminous beyond us and around us, she told me of those things which happened to her folk and herself in the village of Samsoun, on the coast of Asia Minor, not far from where our ship would pass after a passage through the Dardanelles—and of some things she told me I cannot write, because they are not for decent print, though this girl spoke them with a stark and simple truth. All the time she spoke the Italian soldiers were singing their choruses, and some were dancing about us in the gloom of the deck, and the light of their cigarettes glowed like fire-flies.

I remember her narrative still. I think I could tell it almost word by word as it poured from her lips in her queer fluent French, though I will not do so. She told me how at Samsoun the Armenians were first warned of their fate by placards pasted on their walls one night announcing that all Armenian men and women were to be deported to the south. Only those could remain who embraced the faith of Islam. . . . At once the tragedy began. The men were collected together and made to march out of the town, leaving their wives and children.

The women were packed in carts and driven behind the men. Some of them took their children with them, but others abandoned them as they knew for ever, placing them among Greek families who promised out of mercy to adopt them. Only a few men and women yielded to the temptation of saving their own lives by renouncing their own faith. The others chose the martyrdom that was certain.

It began outside the town of Samsoun, and for some of the women, and this girl who spoke to me, lasted for three months, when only twenty out of eighty in one party remained alive. For a little while they travelled

behind their own men in the jolting carts, weeping for the children they had left. Then the men disappeared. Other parties following saw the bodies of their husbands and brothers hanging on wayside trees, or lying with their throats cut in the ditches.

"My father was hanging there," said the girl.

Presently the women were made to walk, because the drivers of the carts would go no farther. They walked over the mountain passes in the glare of the sun, parched with thirst. Their shoes were torn to shreds, and they walked with bare feet wrapped round with rags torn from their petticoats. They camped at night without shelter, and mobs of Kurds and Circassians came down, demanding their rings, trinkets and money, under threat of massacre. So they had to buy off their lives, day after day, until nothing was left. Even their clothes were robbed from them, and many were left naked.

"I had nothing on but a cotton rag," said this girl, "and my naked feet were swollen so that I could hardly walk."

Some of the younger women were carried off by the brigands, and their screams were heartrending to their mothers and sisters, but the Turkish soldiers, who were their guards, did not lift a hand to save them.

"I did not get carried off," said the girl. "I scarred my face with stinging nettles so that it was hideous."

On the way they passed babies still alive at the breasts of their dead mothers, and small children dying by the roadside with other dead. Day by day women fell, unable to walk farther, though the Turks tried to flog them up, and they died of exhaustion.

"I was too strong," said the girl. "I did not die."

The Turks did not kill the women as they had slaughtered the men. They only drove them until they dropped. . . . After the Armistice this Armenian girl, who was a survivor among but few others who had walked from Samsoun, found Greek friends, who took her with them to Smyrna, and thence to Athens. Now she was going to Constantinople.

"Why?" I asked.

She did not answer that question directly, but looked at me sideways in a queer, furtive way.

"I want to find a man whom I met before in Asia," she said.

Her lover? . . . Needless to say, I did not ask that question. But I think I know now that it was not her lover she was going to meet.

The Italian soldiers had tired of singing and had tirned into their hammocks slung above the hatchways. The two old Turks were curled up on their rugs. The Arab woman was a white bundle, like a dead shrouded body, as she lay between some casks and coiled ropes. The ship was quiet, except for the throbbing of the engines and the soft swish of the sea.

"Time to sleep!" said the Armenian girl.

"Perhaps to dream of what you told me," I answered. "What tragedy! . . . Why are men so cruel in a world like this?"

"They will be punished in hell for it, or sooner."

I said good-night to her and went back to my cabin, and slept, without dreaming.

We sailed next day along the coast of Salonica, and passed through the Dardanelles, where once on a day of history a British fleet tried to force a passage under the fire of Turkish batteries on the Asiatic shore, and where an army of splendid youth flung itself ashore in boats which were smashed to tinder under a fury of shells, and then stormed up the barren cliffs, and after months of fighting, parched, fever-stricken, exposed always to murderous fire, failed, despite courage of Homeric quality, to gain the heights of that grim rock of Achi Baba upon which my fellow passengers and I now stared from the side of our ship. We could see the old trenches of English and Australians, and the Turkish trenches facing them, and, against the shelving walls of rock at the water's edge, the wreckage of ships from which the British troops had landed.

"Your men fought bravely," said a voice by my side.

It was Hadji Damad Bey who spoke, and he was sweeping the peninsula with his field-glasses, staring intently at certain landmarks.

"You were there?" I asked, and he nodded and said:

"I see my old gun emplacements. Your troops were

easy targets. They had no cover over there, where those bushes have grown. I mowed them down."

Instinctively I drew back from him a little. He had mowed down good comrades of mine, and the flower of our Empire's boyhood. It was his duty as a Turkish soldier, but not wise to boast of in the presence of an Englishman.

"It was England's greatest folly," he continued. "Stark madness in the face of all our heavy guns. The Ottoman Empire is in ruin—defeated by weight of numbers and internal treachery—but here in the Dardanelles we have a memory of victory which will never be forgotten because of its glory to the valour of the Turk. You do not deny the valour of our defence?"

I did not deny it. The Turks had fought stubbornly and bravely. But I did not care to hear this man gloating over the slaughter of his former enemies, and I moved away from him to another part of the deck, where Hallam Scott sat with little Anna, telling her what had happened on that shore. Katrina Kuropatkine was a little unwell, it seemed, and was staying in her cabin. I did not see her at dinner that night, but later —some hours later, when all the ship was asleep again except in the engine rooms and at the wheel—I heard her voice.

It was very hot that night, with hardly a breath stirring, so that I found my cabin insufferable, and sleep impossible down there. I slipped on an overcoat over my pyjamas, took a blanket with me, and climbed up the boat deck to sleep *al fresco*. It was delightful there, lying back in a deck chair under the shelter of the wireless room and watching the world of stars, wonderfully bright, unaccountable, divinely beautiful. . . God, what a speck of dust was this little world of ours in that great universe, and how vain and futile seemed the passions of men and women, and their cruelties and envies and little follies, in the presence of that stream of stars! . . . I dozed a little, and then woke again when I heard Katrina Kuropatkine's voice. She spoke in a low tone, but I knew the note of it, the pretty timbre of her French, and I heard her words.

"It's to save my family, Hallam. They are so

miserable in their ruin, and with Hadji I can help them. He is generous as well as rich."

Then I heard Hallam answer her angrily:

"So you are giving yourself for Turkish gold! By God, you are no better than other women who sell themselves for luxury!"

Katrina Kuropatkine was angry now.

"That is a cruel thing to say. Beyond forgiveness."

Hallam Scott's voice rang out passionately, so that I could not help hearing him though I hated to play the eavesdropper.

"It is because I love you that I dare say it. Katrina, you are betraying the love that is between us. That is more sacred than any sacrifice you make for the sake of your people. No woman has the right to be a traitor to her soul, and your soul has confessed me as its lover. It's a blasphemy against God's own law, as eternal as those stars above us. There's no meaning in life except love. Your father's poverty—what does that matter? Let him work, like an honest man, instead of living on his daughter's shame. Little Anna? I'm poor, but I have enough to keep her as well as you; and we were happy when we laughed at poverty and made a game of it, a year ago, in Paris. Katrina, this Turk is—a Turk; his blood is Eastern; his faith, such as it is, belongs to Islam and not to Christendom. His way with women is not our way. He would give you no liberty. You would be in 'purdah' with him, his slave and servant. He would break your spirit as that evening he crushed a glass under his heel. Katrina, my dearest, I beseech you not to go with him."

What her answer was I do not know, though she gave a kind of sob, and her body, which I saw vaguely as a shadow, swayed a little towards him. But I could not bear to listen to this any longer—to this talk not meant for any ears but those of the eternal silence harkening to these two human souls—and I stood up from my chair and walked swiftly to the gangway, and went below again.

There on the cabin deck I met another walker in the night, and I was startled. I recognised the figure of the Armenian girl, in spite of the darkness into which she shrank as I came. She was still wearing the wallet

carried from a strap round her shoulders, and it was by that, partly, that I knew her.

"What do you want?" I asked, rather roughly. "This is the first-class deck."

I should not have spoken like that but for a sense of uneasiness which took hold of me. I did not like the way in which she had been slinking along the deck, feeling at the cabin doors, before she saw me. The second officer had warned us against petty thefts.

"I have been dreaming," said the girl. "I lost my way."

Without another word she went swiftly away towards the second-class quarters.

We were due in Constantinople on the Wednesday morning, and by Tuesday night I was anxious to get into that port, not because I wanted to see the beauty of its mosque and minarets, or to study the crowded life of the Grand' Rue de Pera, but because this voyage of ours was becoming too dramatic in its interests, and I had a sense of tragedy—a curious and oppressive foreboding—which was not pleasant.

I cannot tell whether Hadji Damad Bey suspected private conversation between Hallam Scott and Katrina Kuropatkine, but it was quite apparent that he was ill at ease, and most fiercely jealous. By little tricks and subtleties he contrived to prevent Hallam from being alone for a second with the Russian girl, who looked distressed—I think she had been weeping in the night—and several times I saw him looking at my friend with such a sinister and hateful glance that I made up my mind to warn Hallam to keep his cabin door locked when he went to bed. Accidents may happen in a ship like ours.

Before I could give him this warning something else happened which disturbed me a good deal. It was the Turk who should have kept his door locked. So I thought, when to my surprise I saw Hallam come out of Hadji's cabin with the guilty air of a man in the act of theft, and some papers in his hand. It was at four o'clock in the afternoon, when Hadji Damad Bey was taking tea—as I had just seen him—with Katrina Kuropatkine and little Anna.

I could not check an exclamation.

"Good Lord, old man! What are you doing in there?"

He took hold of my wrist tightly, and I could see that he was much excited.

"Don't make a row," he said. "I don't want all the ship to know that I've been searching this cabin."

"It's not usually done," I said.

He saw that I suspected him of ungentlemanly conduct—and I am ashamed of that now—and he jerked his head nervously and said, "Come up into the wireless room. I want your advice."

We went up together, and in the wireless room, after shutting the door and nodding to the Italian operator, he took some telegraph forms out of his pocket and pushed them across the little table. They were wireless messages from the British mission in Constantinople addressed to Hallam and desiring information about Hadji Damad Bey. The two last messages were direct orders.

Search cabin for Turk's papers relative Mustapha Kemal.

That was one message dated Tuesday morning, and the last was even more startling.

Arrest Hadji Damad before disembarking.

I raised my eyebrows and looked up at Hallam.

"What does it all mean?" I asked.

He laughed uneasily.

"Pretty simple. Hadji Damad Bey is up to his neck in the conspiracy of Mustapha Kemal to raise Islam against the Allies, and is coming to Constantinople to make trouble. I don't blame him. It's the Turkish game, and calls to whatever patriotism they have. But of course we have got to stop it. I wish to Heaven it hadn't fallen to me to do the dirty job. . . . It's rather awkward, to say the least of it, for certain private reasons."

He blushed like a schoolboy, and I could see well enough what was in his mind. His arrest of Hadji

Damad Bey might look to Katrina Kuropatkine like private vengeance masking under the name of duty.

"It will be a dramatic moment when we land," I said.

"Too horribly dramatic," was Hallam's answer, with the same uneasy laugh. He did not ask my advice. There was none to ask or to give, as he was under orders; and when I thought the matter over alone it seemed to me that, after all, Hallam was in luck. The Turk would be removed from Katrina's company, for a spell anyhow, and that was all to the good.

What was more to the good, as I heard afterwards, after the end of this voyage, was a note slipped into Hallam's hand that night. It was from Katrina Kuropatkine, who wrote some words which blotted out from Hallam's mind other and hurtful words spoken under the stars on the upper deck.

I did not know that when our voyage ended as we passed out of the Sea of Marmora and, rounding Old Seraglio Point, entered the Golden Horn, and saw in the early sunlight of a May morning the glittering panorama of Constantinople. All passengers were on the decks, gazing at this scene of splendour and that city which for some of them was home, and for others a doubtful market for surplus goods, and for others a rendezvous of dark adventure, and for some of the women a Circe's lair. It was then that a number of men, previously in felt hats or cloth caps, some of those who had gambled long hours away in the card room, or had paced the decks fiddling and fumbling with amber necklaces, blossomed out into the red fez of Islam, and proclaimed themselves as Ottoman subjects, not out of loyalty, I think, but out of fear in a city where a stab in the back might happen to any Christian down a narrow street.

I stood by the side of Katrina Kuropatkine and little Anna, who were both excited by this first view of the city in which their family had found refuge after the horrors of revolution, and where the elder sister would be a Turkish bride unless something happened to break her pledge. She was thinking of that now, I am certain, as her eyes searched this picture of palaces, mosques, gardens and crowded houses on the hillsides above the wide water of the Golden Horn, curved and flashing

like a scimitar between Pera and Stamboul. She put both hands to her breast, and there was the shadow of a fear on her face—so I fancied—as though this sight of a Turkish city held something of terror for her.

Hadji Damad Bey stood by her side, and when he spoke to her she gave a sudden start, as though awakened out of a day-dream.

"Is it not beautiful?" he said. "My city of a thousand glories! See how the domes of San Sophia lie, like rose-coloured clouds, above the cypress trees. Beyond is the great Mosque of Suleyman—how white and slender are its minarets, cutting the blue of the sky like lances! Farther back—you see where it rises above that world of old brown houses—is the Mosque of Mohammed, the conqueror who rode into San Sophia on a day of victory, over the corpses there, and left the imprint of a bloody hand on one of the pillars, where it is now scultured in marble. Those long walls, white in the sun on the water's edge, are the Sultan's palace. Over there is Galata, where the old bridge crosses from Stamboul; and above, on the hill, is Pera, with its Grand' Rue, where Europeans of all nations reveal the beauties of the Christian faith—its night clubs, its dancing halls, its cabarets—to the unbelieving Turk!"

He laughed at the bitter satire of his last words, and then took the hand of Katrina Kuropatkine and spoke in a low voice, so that I did not hear his words. They were tender words, I think, about the home that he offered her, and the happiness he hoped for her, in that strange city whose beauty was outspread before us.

Katrina Kuropatkine said nothing in answer to that, but her head drooped a little.

"I must go and finish packing, my dear," said Hadji Damad Bey. "Then we will get ashore in one of those *caiques*—how good to see them again, and to hear the shouts of Turkish boatmen!"

He touched his red fez in salute and went down to his cabin.

I, too, had some packing to do—the small things that one leaves lying in one's cabin to the last—but I lingered to watch the scene about our ship. Before we had anchored it was surrounded by a swarm of boats, the

narrow *caiques* of the Golden Horn, rowed by Turks who hung on by thrusting grapnel hooks through the port-holes and clinging on to ropes. They were old sun-baked Turks with white beards, and young Turks with only a down on their faces and roving eyes for the unveiled women on our decks, and together they raised a wild chant as they called "Effendi! Effendi!" and invited us to go ashore. Other ships passed us—a steamer with a crowded cargo of Russian refugees, a British destroyer, sailing boats with leg o' mutton sails billowing white above the blue water, and many of the little *caiques* where on Turkish rugs sat Turkish ladies, like bundles of black silk, deeply veiled so that one had no glimpse of a face.

Hallam Scott passed with a grim resolute look. The moment had come when he was going to arrest Hadji Damad Bey, according to his orders. Not a pleasant duty. Not a safe one, I fancied. Perhaps the Turk would show fight. He was a soldier, and passionate, as I had seen. It would create a sensation on board unless Hallam could keep it quiet until all the other passengers had left. And Katrina Kuropatkine—how would she take it? I wondered.

I followed Hallam, not altogether out of curiosity, but because I had a sense of uneasiness. It might be useful for him to have another Englishman at hand. Hadji Damad Bey was a powerful fellow. . . .

I saw Hallam knock at the cabin door with his left hand. In his right hand he held a revolver, and I was glad to see it. Then he opened the little door and went in quickly, leaving it ajar. I think he must have been inside the cabin at least a minute before he came out again, and I heard no sound in that time. When he came out there was a strange look on his face—a scared look.

"Anything the matter?" I asked in a casual way, disguising my anxiety to know the cause of his excitement.

"Very much so," he said. "The Turk has been killed."

He opened the cabin door wide, so that I could see inside. It was not a pleasant thing to see. Hadji Damad Bey was lying face downwards on the floor, with

a knife in his back, and a stain of blood through his coat oozing on to the floor, as red as the fez which lay beside his head.

"Is he dead?" I asked, falling back a little.

"Stone dead," said Hallam gravely. "Who's the murderer?"

He shut the door and locked it, taking the key with him, and we went together to the captain to report what had happened at the journey's end. Many of the passengers had already left the ship. Their boats were already pulling away, with Greek commercial travellers clinging on to enormous cases which almost sank the little craft, and with the red-fezzed Turks and cosmopolitan women. In one boat rowed by two Kurds sat a solitary girl. It was the Armenian girl who had told me her tragic tale and who had a photograph of Hadji Damad Bey in her leather wallet. She looked back at the ship, and seeing me standing on the upper deck waved her hand. I did not answer that farewell, and wondered whether I ought to speak a few words to the captain which would bring the girl back again. Then I remembered her tale of what had happened in Samsoun, and on that march when the Armenian men were massacred, and the children lay dead on the roadside, and the women suffered horrors unspeakable, and Hadji Damad Bey sat among a pile of skulls smoking a cigarette before a German photographer. When I had thought of these things the Armenian girl had disappeared across the Golden Horn, in the *caique* rowed by two Kurds.

. . . . .

There was an inquiry into the death of the Turkish officer, and Hallam Scott had some trouble in the matter, though no suspicion attached to him. When I saw him last, a month ago, he was taking a flat in Paris, somewhere off the Rue Raynouard, and Katrina Kuropatkine was his wife. Little Anna was going to live with them, and the Russian General, their father, was the manager of a restaurant for refugees of his own race, over in the Latin quarter. I had dinner with them there, and we spoke a little of our voyage through enchanted seas.

THE LIEUTENANT OF
THE MARBLE VENUS

THE LIEUTENANT OF THE MARBLE VENUS

During the Peace Conference in Paris it was possible to stay in a good hotel, without financial ruin, only if one happened to be a diplomat, the private secretary of a diplomat, the typist of the private secretary of a diplomat, a newspaper correspondent with unlimited expenses, or a millionaire. Being at the moment none of those things, but only an unattached onlooker of the greatest drama in the world, I took a bed-sitting-room in the Rue de la Pompe at Passy, and was lucky as well as comfortable. It was cheap and quiet, at a time when Paris was expensive to fantastic heights and noisy with the feverish excitement of a people who, after years of frightful sacrifice, went a little mad with the joy of victory and believed—before the time of disillusionment—that from the peace table at Versailles would come compensation for their ruin.

"Germany will be made to pay!" was the confession of faith in Paris, and that false belief in Germany's capacity to pay the entire costs of war—apart from the raising of the innumerable dead—was bolstered up by the Government and the Press. So Paris gave itself up to dancing and singing in the streets; to a pagan riot of love and ecstasy, except where in quiet rooms women wept a little because the end of war and great victory would not bring back their men.

In one of the rooms where I stayed there was a woman who wept a little and I guessed it was for the same reason. She was the mother of a small boy aged seven or eight, by the look of him, with whom I had made friends as he played about on the staircase. He was a beautiful boy, rather English in colour and features to be the son of a French mother. He had a mop of flaxen hair cut straight round the neck in the bobbed style of grown-up

girls, and blue eyes. He seemed to me a lonely youngster, playing so much by himself on the staircase, with toy engines and the little lead soldiers beloved of all French children; but he was not unhappy, and answered brightly and merrily when I spoke to him.

"Fine soldiers!" I said when we first met. "Are they all Frenchmen?"

"Nearly all," he answered in quick, childish French. "Here is Papa Joffre and Foch and Petain and Guynemer the ace. But I have some English, too. Six of them. They cost six sous apiece, and I cannot buy more because my maman is too poor."

"How about the enemy?"

He called them *sacrés Boches*, and told me that they were not sold in the shops. He had to imagine them, and he killed hundreds of them every day.

"During the war maman always asked me how many Boches I had killed, and when I said, 'One hundred this morning,' she used to say, 'That is not enough!' So then I said, 'Two hundred,' and she said again, 'That is not enough!' Sometimes I would say, 'A thousand', and she would smile and say, 'That is better!' She was very pleased when I said, 'A hundred thousand.' 'Soon we will win the war,' she said, 'if you go on killing them like that.'"

I believe this child was convinced in his imaginative way that he had helped to win the war by so great a slaughter of the enemy, and I could not help shivering a little at the gruesomeness of his game, which acquired a kind of reality because of his mother's greed for more dead.

Yet she was not a grim-looking woman. Indeed, I thought—and still think—that she had a pretty and seductive face, in spite of being a little too thin and fragile. She was quite young. She could not have been more than a girl when this boy was born before the war; and that she was a lady of good birth and refinement was obvious in every gesture she made and every word she spoke. Madame de Thilloy was her name, so the *concierge* told me, and her boy was Charles.

"Her husband?" I asked, and the fat old woman who acted as *concierge* in a dirty little room on the ground

floor of this house in the Rue de la Pompe mumbled something about the cruelty of the war and the massacre of youth.

I was not surprised therefore when, on the day of the Peace celebrations, I noticed that Madame de Thilloy still wore her black dress and that her eyes were red with weeping at a time when the music of victory was passing down the streets and hundreds of thousands of young women were laughing and singing and throwing flowers at passing soldiers and kissing English and American officers and proclaiming to the high heaven their joy because life was good enough again after the years of death.

As I came upstairs toward the door of their apartment, which was wide open, the boy Charles was clasping his mother's dress and imploring her to go out with him.

"Maman, maman!" cried the boy. "I want to see Papa Joffre and Marshal Foch! I want to see the flags passing, and all the soldiers!"

"The crowds are too big, my son," said the young mother. "Let us stay quietly at home, and I will buy you some bonbons."

"I don't want any bonbons!" shouted the boy. "I want to see the Victory March!"

He raged at her with a sudden childish fury.

"I will go out!" he stormed in a desperate way. "You are not good if you do not take me!"

Madame de Thilloy spoke to him sharply and slapped his hands, which were clinging to her.

"Silence! You are behaving like a little Boche. I will shut you up alone if you are so ill-mannered."

It seemed to me a harsh thing to say, though the child had lost his temper in a sudden passion of rage and disappointment. But then this French girl, who was so young a mother, bent down and put her arms about the boy and kissed his flaxen hair.

"My little son," she cried in a pitiful way, "do not ask me to go out! I have not the courage! I am a little sad to-day!"

The boy jerked himself away from her embrace and stood breathing hard, with a mutinous look; and it was then that I passed, having heard what had happened as I stood a moment on the landing.

"Forgive me," I said to the girl—even now she was hardly more than that; "will you let me take your boy out to see the victory procession? It's a historic day and he ought not to miss it. As a French boy he has a right to see it."

The girl looked at me in a startled way, not having seen my approach, and then, I am sure, she was going to say something which was almost on her lips before she checked the words. It was something enormously tragic, as I now know, but after that hesitation in which our eyes met she spoke ordinary words of thanks.

"You are very kind. It would be a great disappointment to my boy not to go, and I am too unwell to-day to take him. If it would not be asking too much——"

"I shall be delighted," I said.

That was indeed the truth, and I had a fine day with Charles de Thilloy, whose rapture and enthusiasm at the sight of the French generals and colours and troops helped me to face the ghosts of great armies of dead youth who marched beside these living men, and the thought of all the ruin that was left in Europe after a victory so hardly won.

The boy seemed to me to embody the spirit of young France. The colour that flushed his cheeks, the light of his eyes, the shrill cheers that broke from him when the heroes passed proved the ardour of his young heart, instinctive and inherited, for the glory of France as it was seen in the war—and in God knows how many wars—by the supreme valour of her manhood. I could not deny that glory, having seen it in suffering as well as in valour; yet with this young boy by my side I hoped with a kind of prayer that the youth of his race who had been left alive, and these children of victory, would escape from such another massacre as that which had soaked their fields in blood, and would adopt some philosophy greater than the power of the sword.

I took him to a little restaurant in some side street off the Avenue Victor Hugo, and we managed in spite of the crowd to get a table for two wedged in by the window. I remember how young French officers and their womenfolk looked at the child as he sat opposite me on a chair made higher by some old bound copies of *L'Illustration*,

and how they smiled at him with a kind of homage in their eyes because of his beauty of childhood. To all of them he symbolised, I think, the promise of the future, like a figure of Cupid, and to them as well as to me was young France personified. At least it was so to those who sat near enough to hear his prattle in French, though others took him for my son, with his fair hair and blue eyes, and said, "*C'est un vrai petit Anglais*"—truly English.

He tucked into a big meal, brandishing his knife and fork like a buccaneer, and taking great quaffs of lemonade and clapping his hands with delight when the waiter, at my order, brought him a *coupe Jacques*. He was old in manner for his years, and when I smoked cigarettes over coffee he sat with his hands clasped under his dimpled chin, chatting gravely and answering my questions with old-fashioned politeness.

"Do you remember what the world was like before the war?" was one thing I asked him, to keep the conversation going; and he thought hard before he answered.

"Sometimes I think I do, monsieur, and sometimes I think I don't. It's like when one wakes up surprised with a dream. One doesn't know if the dream has left off. *N'est-ce pas?*"

"Yes, I understand. But don't you remember some other kind of home?"

"My mother says I don't. She says I'm dreaming, or remembering a dream, when I tell her that I once lived in a big house with a clock in the hall as high as a man, and a winding staircase going up as high as the Eiffel Tower, and my father walking up and down a big room as wide as the Place de la Concorde, singing songs in a voice like the organ of the Madeleine."

I laughed at the child, and noticed the smiling faces of other people who were listening.

"That sounds very much like a dream!"

"There is something else I remember," said the boy, "but maman says it is a dream, too."

"What is that?"

"I remember the first day of the war, when all the people were going away and all the women were crying.

Father went away too, and mother was crying. She came and cried by my bed before I went to sleep in the night. I stroked her hand and said, 'Little maman, when will my father come back?' and she cried again so that my face was wet when she touched it with her cheek, and she said, 'Your father will never come back, my little son.' And then I cried, too."

He spoke these words in a matter-of-fact way, without pathos or self-pity, which is not in the nature of children, but I saw how they touched the hearts of the people at the table close to us. There was a painted girl there with a young officer—not a very good girl, I should say, but her eyes filled with tears, and she spoke to the officer and said, "*C'est triste, ça!*"

"My mother is sometimes a little strange," said the boy. "She does not like me to speak about my father, who was killed. When I ask her how many Germans he put to death before they shot him, she says, 'We will not talk about that,' and if I ask too often she gets very white and angry."

I made him talk about other things, and for a time kept him interested by blowing smoke rings and making a funny face with orange peel. But a little later he spoke about his home life again.

"Perhaps I'll have a new father soon. My maman can't always say no to the Lieutenant Méricourt, do you think?"

"I don't know the Lieutenant Méricourt. Who is he?"

Young Charles de Thilloy was surprised by my ignorance.

"But he is very famous, the Lieutenant Méricourt! He has the Croix de Guerre and the Légion d'Honneur, and was three times cited before the Army for valour."

"I ought to have known," I said humbly.

"That was how he lost his arm. The Croix de Guerre is generally given for an arm or a leg or an eye. That seems to me a little silly, but it is the rule, I think."

"I suppose the bravest men are most likely to lose their arms and legs," I suggested.

"Foch hasn't, and he's the bravest of them all!" said this patriotic child. Then he returned to the subject of Lieutenant Méricourt, who obviously came next

to Foch in his list of heroes. "He wants maman and me to go and live with him. He loves maman more than anyone in the world, and after that he loves me. And I love him, so that it would be splendid to have him for a father."

"I hope it will happen," I said.

"Madame Bertrand says the Lieutenant Méricourt will never marry my mother, and when I told her she was a lying old cow she beat me over the back with a broom."

"It was rather naughty to call her that," I remarked, for the sake of discipline and high morality. "But who is this Madame Bertrand?"

"But surely you know Madame Bertrand! She is our *concierge*. She is as fat as the full moon."

It was true. I remembered the name of the old woman who always slept too soundly to pull the cord of the outside door at night until I had rung the bell to the limit of patience.

We met her when we went home hand in hand. Madame Bertrand was with her husband, and both of them were intoxicated by this day of victory, though neither of them, I am certain, owed any of their elation to alcoholic drink. The old woman's bonnet was askew and her face was as red as the rag of revolution, though beaming with patriotic joy. Monsieur Bertrand, a little wizened man, was holding his wife's hand as though they two were a lover and his lass. I am sure they had been dancing through the streets of Paris, like so many others we had passed. They were out of breath when they came up to the courtyard of the tall house in the Rue de la Pompe of which they were the guardians.

"A glorious procession!" I said by way of greeting.

"The day of victory, monsieur! The spirit of France triumphant!"

So said the old man, taking off his hat and wiping his forehead with a big handkerchief that he drew from the tail of his coat.

"I hope the music of our bands reached as far as Berlin," said the old woman. "Those sacrés Boches know they are defeated now. I wish every one of them were dead, and all their race, for what they made us suffer."

"I killed a hundred thousand of them!" said the boy, whose hand I held.

Madame Bertrand cackled with laughter at this statement of imaginary slaughter, and then suddenly she drew the boy to her bosom—he was lost for a moment in her capaciousness—and spoke over his head in a solemn way:

"May the good Jesus have mercy on the mother of this child, and all poor mothers like her!"

Old Bertrand stared at the boy in a curious, shamefaced way.

"It's a pity he was born," he growled. "I've said so a thousand times."

"Name of God, a child is a child, war or no war!" cried Madame Bertrand, releasing young Charles from her clasp and stroking his hair. She turned to me in an explanatory way and added, "We weren't blessed with a little one, monsieur."

"He'd have been killed in the shambles, like all the others," said the old man.

"Yes, but a hero of France, mon vieux! One of those who won the victory! Ah, what honour!"

"All the same," mumbled the old man, "I didn't want young blood to save my old hairs."

The boy was holding my hand again, and staring with pondering eyes at Madame Bertrand and the old man. Whether he understood more of their talk than I did I know not, but when he tugged at my hand and led the way up the grand escalier—a dark and narrow staircase—he made an impatient remark which startled me.

"Those people are like my maman! They're sorry I was born!"

"Hush!" I said. "Don't talk like that, Charles! It's wicked and untrue. Your maman loves you with all her heart, I am certain."

"I know," he answered with his childish gravity. "She loves me, but is sorry I was born. Women are like that."

I could not help laughing at that last remark from this philosopher who knew few women but his mother and Madame Bertrand. But as I laughed I had a sense of some tragedy which had cast a shadow over this

child's mind, though he knew no more than I did, perhaps, as to the spectre behind the shadow.

His girl mother, Madame de Thilloy, answered the bell when I rang at the door of his *appartement*. She embraced her boy and then turned to me graciously.

"You are very kind, monsieur. Will you not come in and take a glass of wine? I have a friend with me who would be glad to meet you."

It was Charles who shouted the friend's name with glee.

"Le Lieutenant Méricourt!"

A faint colour crept over the pale skin of Madame de Thilloy as she answered, "Yes, it is our lieutenant."

I excused myself once or twice, but as she pressed me I yielded to an invitation which seemed sincerely given.

She led the way into her little *salon*, poorly but prettily furnished, as I saw at a glance, and with that faint scent of polished wood and black coffee which lingers always in French rooms, and seems—even in imagination, as I write these words—to bring back memories of France. A figure rose as we entered, and I saw that it was a young officer of the Chasseurs Alpins, with an empty sleeve and a row of medals and a fine hard face of the southern type, with black eyes and ruddy skin. The boy was hugging him round the waist, but when Madame de Thilloy presented him he stood straight and bowed formally, and gave me his hand with a cordial grasp.

"You have our D.S.O. besides all the others!" I said, glancing at his medals; and he smiled and answered, with just a touch of the south in the roll of his *r's*:

"I am proud of that! I was in Flanders on the left of your troops in the April fighting."

He had his one arm round the boy now, and we chatted a little together.

Meanwhile Madame de Thilloy brought out some wine and filled three glasses.

"Charles, my child," she said, "go and wash your face and hands. They are enormously dirty."

But Charles protested.

"Maman, let me have some wine, too, on this day of the Victory March!"

I saw her hesitate, looking at her boy with thoughtful

eyes. The French lieutenant laughed and smoothed the lad's hair.

"Why not? It will do him no harm to take a sip."

"The smallest drop!" said Madame de Thilloy, and she poured out a little wine into a fourth glass. It was the lieutenant who raised his first and proposed a toast.

"*A notre belle victoire!*"

We clinked glasses and drank, remembering the years of horror.

"*A la France!*" I said, and both Lieutenant Méricourt and Madame de Thilloy answered by raising their glasses to me and saying very solemnly, "*A nos Alliés!*"

Then it was the turn of Charles, and drinking before he gave the toast with a great gulp of his little drop of wine he raised his glass like a laughing Cavalier, and shouted "*A bas les Boches!*"

I laughed at that, and so did the lieutenant, who repeated the words and drank the toast; but I saw that Madame de Thilloy put her glass down and did not drink. She saw that I noticed that, for she turned to me with a quick smile and gave me an explanation.

"Let us not think of the enemy to-day! Let us remember only our heroes, alive and dead!"

I liked her for that. There was no need now to say, "*A bas les Boches!*" They were down and out, and remembering their own dead and their irretrievable ruin without consolation of any kind. In the hour of great victory we could afford to be chivalrous even to Germans.

During that hour I stayed with Madame de Thilloy I noticed two things which made me wonder a little about the meaning of this girl's life. I noticed—it was impossible not to see so plain a thing—the adoration of the French lieutenant for this lady. There was a homage in his eyes, which followed her about the room whenever she moved. It was indeed more than homage. It was a spiritual hunger. The man desired this woman's love so that the sound of her voice was music to him and every gesture she made was a beauty in his eyes. But he called her always madame, and spoke with a reverence and courtesy that disproved any notion I

may have had that they were lovers, accepted and acknowledged. The second thing that intrigued me somewhat was the absence of any photograph of this woman's husband. My gaze roved about the mantelshelf for the usual portrait of a French soldier—officer or *poilu*—draped in tri-colour, as in so many homes of France where women waited for their men, or on such a day as this gazed at the image of one of those martyrs who had died for France. It was not on the mantelshelf or in any corner of the room.

While the lieutenant told some story of the war my mind wandered down byways of imagination in that absurd way which most minds have, almost subconsciously, of tracking down a thought to fanciful conclusions.

"This girl's husband is a bad hat," I thought. "Perhaps he ran off with some other woman in the war. Or perhaps he was a coward or a traitor who has disgraced his name. A traitor! Yes, that would account for what the old *concierge* said about the boy. 'It's a pity he was ever born!' That would be horrible. To be the wife of a man shot as a traitor, like that fellow Bolo. Still, of course, it may be the other way round. Perhaps Madame de Thilloy was not as faithful as she might have been, and now is conscience stricken at the thought of the dead man, who, being dead, knows her guilt. No, that is ridiculous and caddish. What right have I to build up theories about this poor girl? How one's brain busies itself with other people's affairs!"

After that evening on the fête day of victory I became a frequent guest in the little *salon* of Madame de Thilloy, owing to the devotion of young Charles, who shared me in his affection, it seemed, with his heroic lieutenant. Together we fought the Battle of the Marne and many bloody episodes of trench warfare on the polished boards of his mother's sitting-room with the little lead soldiers who had astounding qualities of courage and *élan*; and on sunny afternoons we stood watching the antics of Polichinelle—the French Punch—in the Champs-Elysées, or went for piratical voyages on the lake of the Bois de Boulogne which ended happily with rose-tinted ices on the Ile des Châlets. Sometimes the Lieutenant

Méricourt joined these expeditions, and I came to like that Chasseur Alpin with an empty sleeve. He was a gay-hearted fellow, with something of the spirit of those old troubadours of Provence whose poetry he knew by heart and recited with a tenderness and passion which made it live again. He was always singing little old songs of France, to the great joy of young Charles; and sometimes, but not often, he told stories of his adventure in the war. That was when Charles pleaded hard with him.

"Mon lieutenant, tell me of how you captured the château of Vermelles. As a great treat, mon lieutenant!"

"No, no, Charles, let me forget the smell of blood and the sight of dead men! War is a dirty business—idiotic!"

"But I want to hear how you fought the Germans with the marble Venus."

"Poor lady! She was a figure of love, not made for such a scene as that. I will tell you the tale of Le Chat Botté."

"No, no, mon lieutenant! Please! I want to hear about the fat Germans sticking half-way through the ceiling, and how they squealed when your men poked them with bayonets."

The lieutenant turned to me when the boy pleaded like that, and laughed in a comical way.

"Youth is very bloodthirsty! How are we going to kill the spirit of war in the human heart? You see, even now, so soon after the massacre which has destroyed the best blood of Europe, young ears listen to the tales of war as though they were the exploits of Jack the Giant Killer!"

"Better than that, mon lieutenant!" cried Charles. "I like the true tales best. Tell us about the château of Vermelles."

So, spilling a little wine on the wooden table under the trees on the Ile des Châlets, that flower-strewn isle on the lake of the Bois, Armand Méricourt made a map of Vermelles, with the French lines round the village and the château in the centre of the German stronghold.

"I was here with my company. We had a machine-gun behind some sandbags, but we had to keep our heads down, I can tell you, because the Germans had snipers

in the windows of the château, five hundreds yards away, and killed any man who showed his pate for a single second. I had eight men killed like that, and their bodies lay unburied among us for three days, and we watched their faces go black and their bodies swell out in the heat. Not amusing that, my little one!"

Not amusing, but terribly thrilling to young Charles, who listened with his mouth open, drinking in this tale.

"We were preparing a mine to blow up the garden wall before an assault on the château. You remember I have told you how we fought through the little gardens and from wall to wall before we reached the outskirts of the small *place* in which the red brick château stood. Many of my poor comrades had fallen and at night we could hear the wounded crying and groaning, where many of them lay half-buried under piles of bricks and earth flung on top of them by shell-fire. Not good sounds to hear at night above the chatter of the *mitrailleuses*!"

Not good sounds, but the boy Charles made a tattoo on the wooden table with his finger-nails to imitate machine-gun fire.

"The château was stuffed with German machine-guns. All day and night they swept the little *place*, and I knew that when we made our hole through the wall it was my job to cross that *place* with my company and lead the assault on the château. '*C'est drôle, ça*,' I said to myself a thousand times. 'To-morrow I shall be dead. To-day I am alive. I am very thirsty. These two hands of mine——'"

"One hand," said Charles.

"Two hands, my little one. It was before I lost my arm. 'These two hands of mine can touch, press the trigger of a machine-gun, obey every direction of my brain. To-morrow, when I cross that *sacrée place*, they will be like the hands of that dead body sticking out of loose earth a yard away from where I stand alive—limp, leathery, dead. That is queer,' I thought. 'It is also damnable.'"

"Were you frightened?" asked Charles.

"Enormously frightened," answered the Lieutenant

Méricourt, and this confession of a great hero thrilled the boy with a kind of exquisite horror.

"It was at eleven o'clock in the morning that we mined the wall. It went up with a roar and a cloud of red brick dust. 'Come on, you imbeciles!' I shouted to my men—they loved me to call them imbeciles—and, as mad as devils, we made a rush into the *place*, where the red château stood with shell-holes in the wall and sand-bags in its windows, and *mitrailleuses* lashing the ground about us with wicked little bullets."

"What happened then?" asked Charles, who had heard this story before and knew exactly what happened.

"A funny little thing happened," said the Chasseur Alpin, forgetting the boy a little and speaking to me, with sombre eyes in which was the memory of a *mauvais quart d'heure*. "A German officer, seeing the mine explosion, came rushing out of the château with some machine-gunners to stop our way through the wall, but before he could get his gun into action we were on him with out bayonets. The fool had left the château door open, and that gave us our chance. We made a dash for that open door. I think it was fear that made us make for it, to get cover from the *mitrailleuses*, which were vomiting lead about us. I had a pain like a red-hot poker through my right arm, and I remember cursing with the foulest words. And I remember seeing some of my men bowled over like rabbits as they ran. And after that I remembered nothing until I was inside the drawing-room of the château with half a dozen lads. We panted there like pigs, and there was a strange silence in the room except for that hard breathing. It was a well-furnished room, with a piano in the corner and some plush-covered chairs torn by rifle fire and covered with plaster which had fallen from the ceiling, leaving only the naked laths up there. And in one corner of the room was a wooden pedestal with a figure of Venus on it, in white marble, unbroken."

The boy Charles drew a deep breath and smiled at this mention of the marble Venus. It was the choicest thrill of the story.

"Upstairs there was the noise of men's voices—German voices—shouting and cursing. I think they had

found out we were in the house. We let them know for certain. I fired my revolver through the ceiling, and heard the cry of a wounded man. Then my men smashed the laths with the butt ends of their rifles. Two of them stood on the sofa to reach the ceiling better. The laths gave way, and some Germans came through half-and-half, with their legs dangling.

"They were screaming, and my men laughed when they stuck them with bayonets. It was very comical. I was laughing like a madman—you know how it is in war—when the whole ceiling came down, and a dozen Germans fell on top of us.

"It is difficult to remember details, monsieur. It is a little like a dream afterward—a nightmare. I remember that one of my lads had his nose bitten off by a German who was on top of him, and another, a Breton, strangled a big German with his two thumbs on the windpipe, which made a strange, gurgling noise. I had lost my revolver when the ceiling came down, and had no weapon. It was then that I seized the marble Venus with my left hand. You remember, I told you of that pain in my right arm, like a red-hot poker? It was a good thing, that white Venus, hard and handy. I held her by the legs and brained a German who sprang at my throat. After that, two more. Then the Venus broke in half, and I was at the mercy of a German officer who stood by the open door of the little *salon* with an automatic pistol which covered me. I had not seen him before, but now I stared into his eyes and made ready to spring at him. Suddenly he dropped his pistol, and before he could stoop to pick it up I had my foot on it. He spoke to me in French.

"'It is strange to meet here, Armand Méricourt.'

"I stared at him again, and said, 'Who are you *Schweinhund*?'

"'Once we were friends,' he said, and I remembered him as a man I had known in Dresden before the war, when I was studying music.

"'Now,' I said, 'we are not friends, and I am going to kill you.'"

"But you did not kill him!" said Charles.

"No, he was too quick for me. He turned from the

door and ran down a passage which led to the garden of the château. He was the only German who escaped alive from the château of Vermelles. I am sorry he escaped."

"So am I," said Charles. "But it is a splendid story."

Armand Méricourt touched his empty sleeve.

"It cost me that."

"Queer coincidence, meeting that German at such a time!" I said. "What was his name?"

"I have forgotten his name."

He put his one arm round the boy Charles, who snuggled close to him adoringly, and said tenderly: "Sometimes I wish to forget all those years of war as completely as I have forgotten that man's name. Peace is better, cleaner, more beautiful, here on the Ile des Châlets, with roses in bloom, and boys making love to their girls, and white clouds that are prettier than the smoke of shell-fire."

I know now that he remembered the German's name as well as that scene in the château of Vermelles. It was Madame de Thilloy who told me the name a few nights later, when I sat with her alone, after the boy had gone to bed.

We had been playing a game of cards together for the amusement of Charles, and I noticed that the girl's hand trembled when she played, and that once when there was a knock at the door she let all her calls fall, to the great disgust of Charles, and stared toward the door with a panic look.

It was only the postman, but that she was suffering from a sense of fear I knew when I rose to take my leave, as soon as Charles had gone off to his room.

"Stay with me a little while," she said; and then in a pitiful way, "I am frightened."

The confession was so abrupt that I was startled, and more alarmed when suddenly she lost control of her nerve and wept with most passionate grief. I could do nothing but utter silly, soothing words, with the awkwardness of an Englishman at such a time, and presently she gained some self-control and begged me to pardon her for such lack of dignity, such foolishness.

I lit a cigarette and chatted about small things, while she mopped her eyes, and then mentioned Armand Méricourt and his wonderful story of the château of Vermelles, and his strange meeting with the German he had known in Dresden.

"It's a pity he has forgotten the man's name," I remarked to keep the conversation going.

"He has not forgotten," said Madame de Thilloy, "and I will tell you."

She spoke with a curious emphasis which gave her words a sense of tragedy, though why I could not guess.

"His name," she said, with a quick indrawing of breath, "is Franz von Mürren. He is my husband, and the father of Charles."

I confess that I was dumbfounded by these words, and could think of nothing on earth to say except some foolish murmur of "Really!" or "Good gracious!" which did not meet the case at all.

"You know his name?" asked Madame de Thilloy more calmly, after her astonishing confession. "He was a famous singer before the war."

Yes, I remembered then. He had taken London by storm at Covent Garden as Lohengrin, on a gala night, when the King and Queen were there. A young, tall man with blue eyes and a handsome, boyish face. His portrait had been in all the picture papers. He had been interviewed a score of times. He was lionised in London society before going abroad again to many capitals of Europe.

That evening in the little *salon* Madame de Thilloy, as she called herself now by her maiden name, told me with wonderful candour and simplicity the story of how this young German had fallen in love with her and she with him. She did not deny her love for him in those days when she had been a pupil of his, or the happiness of their married life when for three years before the war she had travelled with him, and then, before another season of opera which never came because the drums of death played other music in the world, lived with him in a big old house at Auteuil, beyond the roar of Paris."

"That was the house that Charles remembers," I said; and Madame de Thilloy nodded and smiled a little.

"Yes, his dream house with the big clock in the hall and the winding stairs as high as the Eiffel Tower."

"And the man who sang old songs in a voice like the organ of the Madeleine."

I think the most pitiful thing in Madame de Thilloy's narrative was the memory of the love that still came pressing back into her heart for this German husband whom she had abandoned for ever. He had adored her, it was clear, and there had been no harsh word between them until that day when she implored him not to go back to Germany and fight against France. They had had a frightful scene. The man had wept more than the woman, cursing war, protesting to God against the abomination that was coming upon the world, and yet giving his wife no hope that he would desert his country.

"I am a German," he said over and over again. "I must go back, and, if need be, fight for my Fatherland. I am a German! I cannot escape from my duty!"

"But you may have to kill my brothers!" his wife had cried out.

"Your brothers may kill me," he had answered. "The boyhood of France and Germany will die in the same shambles."

They had argued, quarrelled and wept again. Then Franz von Mürren had to go, because an *agent de police* came to see him in the last train to Basle. He had embraced the baby, Charles, but his wife, Suzanne, had not embraced him in the last moment. She had called him the enemy of her country, and though he struggled to kiss her hands she would not let him until she fell into a swoon. A tragic scene that was happening in more rooms than one in the world that night on the outbreak of war! The rest had followed—the invasion of Belgium, the atrocity stories, the slaughter of French youth; and Suzanne, who called herself de Thilloy—her maiden name—hated the memory of her German husband with the shuddering aversion of all Frenchwomen—or most—for the race that had done such evil deeds. She had suffered in the years of the war. Her two brothers had been killed, one on the Somme, one at Verdun, that greatest of graveyards.

"You had one comfort," I said. "You had little Charles."

I think only a Frenchwoman would have revealed another cause of tragedy so frankly and with such an intimate knowledge of her own psychology as this lady did to me. Little Charles had been an agony and not a comfort to her. Her very love for him was like a poisoned dagger in her heart. As he grew older she could see the German in him getting stronger, unmistakable. Nothing would alter his blue eyes and his fair hair; nothing would alter a hundred little traits of character, of manner, even of speech, in which she saw—or fancied she saw, poor soul—the blood and spirit of the German race. He ate his soup like a German—I told her that all children do. He had a habit of sudden rages. He laughed like a German, had a passion for music—"Nothing wrong in that!" I said—and was Teutonic in a way that frightened her.

"Sometimes," she told me, "I see in him a miniature Boche, the little incarnation of the German race, and it makes my heart swoon."

"Nerves!" I said. "Morbid psychology, madame. Charles is French to his finger-tips, crazy about *la gloire de France*, and the noblest boy for his age I have ever met on this side of the Channel."

She shook her head miserably.

"I should love him better if he had dark eyes, like Armand Méricourt."

I think those words slipped out before she knew she was speaking them, for instantly they left her lips she blushed very deeply. When I rose to go she told me something else which startled me as much as her first confession of a German husband.

"Why were you frightened to be left alone?" I asked.

She hesitated before she answered, and then spoke in a low voice:

"I have told you so much that I may now tell you all. That man who was my husband is in Paris. He is one of the secretaries of the Peace Commission. It is certain that he will try to find me."

I was silent at this piece of news.

"You will never go back to him?" I asked.

"I would die rather!" she told me, and there was a thrill of passion in her voice. One must have seen in France during the years of war to understand the mentality of this lady. One must have seen the flame of hatred in the soul of France for all that was German. I think an Engish wife of a German husband would have kept her love for him, if she had loved him, in spite of the brutalities of war, and would have seen the tragedy of the conflict with a wider pity for its victims on both sides, with loyalty to England and yet with fidelity to her man and recognition of his own sense of duty and honour. Indeed, I know women of England who had to face that frightful problem of double allegiance, and who rose above the limiting ideal of national hatred. In France, invaded, outraged, martyred, it was more difficult, almost beyond human nature. Yet my own view is that the love of two human beings should be sacred even in the passion of a conflict dividing their peoples to the death, if they are truly mated; though I admit that "if" begs half the question.

During the next few days Madame de Thilloy had no need of my company, I found, for Armand Méricourt, the Chasseur Alpin spent many hours in her *salon*, with the boy as a third party.

I think the lieutenant was pleading with her for a final abandonment of her German husband and for a new scheme of life by which his own dream would be fulfilled. So much I guessed from the prattle of young Charles, whom I met in the courtyard, and who told me that his lieutenant was very angry with maman because she would not go and play with him in his house at Tours.

"He thinks it is *idiot* of maman to stay here for ever, when his heart is hungry for her in that château which is empty. That is what my lieutenant said, though I do not understand how his heart is hungry at Tours while his body is here and quite well fed. I think it is poetry he is speaking."

I thought so, too, and I pitied the poet heart of the man who had been through hell in war and now wanted joy in peace.

Charles spent an afternoon in my rooms while his

mother and the lieutenant went driving in the Bois, and it was after a game of dominoes that there was a knock at the door.

"Come with me, Charles," I said, "and I will see what the postman brings to-day."

But it was not the postman. When I opened the door, while Charles held my hand, I saw a tall young man outside, whose face seemed vaguely known to me—a handsome face, blue-eyed and rather English looking. He lifted his hat and spoke in almost perfect French, perfect except for a slightly heavy *r*. He seemed very nervous and agitated.

"Pardon me—does a lady named Madame de Thilloy live here?"

I guessed at once that it was Franz von Mürren. His wife had prepared me for that, though not for this coming to my own door. Before I could answer him his gaze had fallen on the child, and a bright, eager look came into his eyes.

"Is it possible?" he said in a kind of whisper. Then he gave a queer cry, and said: "Charles! My little son. Oh, my dear baby, grown so tall, so big!"

Before I could speak he had lifted the boy to his heart and kissed him a dozen times greedily, while tears streamed down his face. The boy was frightened. He struggled out of the man's arms and then took cover behind me. Franz von Mürren called to him:

"Charles, my son, do not be afraid! I am the father who went away from you when the war began. I have come back again."

"My father is dead," said Charles. Then something, I think, stirred in the child's memory, some face dimly remembered as in a dream, and he asked a queer question: "Are you the man who sang with an organ voice?"

"Yes," said Franz von Mürren. "The father who sang you to sleep with old lullabies."

It was then that I stepped between father and son.

"Sir," I said, "this child is in my care for a little while, and his mother has not given me permission to let him talk with—with—visitors."

I remember stammering out the words, afraid of hurting the man, this man who had come back, yet thinking

of what Madame de Thilloy would say when she came home again.

"He is my son," said the man simply. "His mother is my very dear wife. I have long been parted from her by this tragic war."

"Are you really my father?" asked Charles. "Have you come alive again?"

"Yes," said Franz von Mürren, "I have come back to life."

How could I keep this man from his son when I could see that his whole soul was stirred with joy by the sight of the child? What right had I to step in between them? None in the world, I thought, and still think.

Yet, knowing the hatred of the boy's mother for this German husband, I was put into a very grave predicament, for I owed some loyalty to her, having been left with her child on trust, as it were.

At that moment I heard the laughter of Armand Méricourt at the bottom of the staircase, and guessed that Madame de Thilloy was with him. I shrank from the really tragic thought that a meeting between this husband and wife should happen without warning, and with the Chasseur Alpin and myself as onlookers. I spoke sharply to the boy:

"Charles, run downstairs! Tell the lieutenant I am here!"

The boy was startled by my sudden command, and ran as I bade him, with a cry of "*Mon lieutenant*!" I think he wanted to tell his hero this wonderful news of the father who had come back, but I did not think then of its effect upon that Frenchman.

I spoke to Franz von Mürren:

"Come inside, sir, I beg of you."

He stepped farther into the passage, and I shut the door behind him and led him to my room.

So we stood face to face, and I remember now the anguish in the man's eyes, startled by my action of sending the boy away, and guessing a little, perhaps, the near presence of his wife.

"You are English, are you not?" he said, speaking in my own tongue. "May I ask what you have to do with my wife and boy?"

"I am a mere friend," I answered. "But your wife has told me something of her life."

"Then you know that I am German?" he said.

"Yes, I know."

He was silent for a moment, thinking deeply.

He seemed like a man who sees all his life outspread, as men say the drowning do.

"This war," he said—and I was struck by the beauty of his speaking voice and remembered his fame as a singer—"this tragic war has not made it good to be a German in France or England. In my case it has been the worst of tragedies, for it made me the enemy of my wife's people. But all through these years I have lived with the hope of finding her love again, and seeing her dear beauty, which is my life, and devoting all the years I may have to her happiness. Do you know my wife well enough to tell me whether the man she once loved may hope for that?"

The wistfulness of these words, their humiliation, touched me poignantly.

"She has not written to you?" I asked.

"For five years I have had no word—nor any of my friends."

"It was difficult for you to bear," I said.

"Difficult, yes, but not impossible."

He waited for me to give him some hope, and I cast about my mind for some vague, noncommittal words which might give him faint consolation. All my pity was for this German now, and the spectres of the war did not stir my hatred. A stricken soul seems to me above all racial enmities. I spoke to him again:

"I don't know your wife very well; not well enough to give you any answer to your question. But if you'll wait here I'll go and see her and take a message, and bring back her reply."

He accepted this like a hungry dog to whom a bone is thrown.

"Tell her this," he said: "'I die without you. My loves cries out for you. In the name of God, who made us man and wife, I beg you to see me again.'"

I left him standing there and went across the outside passage to the door opposite my own. When I knocked

it was Armand Méricourt who opened it. There was an unusual pallor beneath the bronze of his skin, and his dark eyes were sombre.

"Has that *sacré Boche* gone?" he asked.

"Not yet. I have a message for his wife."

He swore a frightful oath, but stood by while I passed into the little *salon*.

Madame de Thilloy stood close to the table, white to the lips, and waited for me to speak. Charles held to her frock. He looked frightened and was quite silent. Some tragic scene had happened before I came.

"I have a message, madame, from your husband," I said. "Have I your permission to give it before Lieutenant Méricourt and little Charles?"

She nodded, but did not speak.

I repeated the words of Franz von Mürren exactly as I remembered them.

"He says, 'I die without you. My love cries out for you. In the name of God, who made us man and wife, I beg you to see me.'"

Madame de Thilloy, as she was called, raised her hands and put them up to her face, and I thought she was near swooning.

It was Armand Méricourt who spoke first after my message.

"Tell this Boche," he said savagely, "that his Kaiser broke all contracts made by God and man between French and Germans. He is no longer the husband of this lady."

I turned to Madame de Thilloy and spoke to her gently:

"Shall I take back your answer, madame?"

She tried to speak and failed, and then broke into spasms of weeping. Charles stroked her hand, but I think she was unconscious of that touch. It was Armand Méricourt who spoke again:

"There is an easy way and a good answer. I will go and kill the man, and finish what I left undone in the château of Vermelles."

He took his revolver from its case and slouched toward the door. I am certain that he intended to fulfil his words.

"Not in my room!" I said, and stood between him and the door.

"You, too," growled this Chasseur Alpin, "if you stand in my way!"

I'm certain he meant that also, and I was very near death that moment. Then Madame de Thilloy spoke:

"I will go and see this man."

She put her hand on my arm, and the Chasseur Alpin fell back before her and let us pass. I think he was cowed by the tragedy of her face, so white, so ghostly.

My little door on the other side of the passage was locked by the click of the patent catch, and I remember fumbling with the key before I could get it open.

Franz von Mürren stood just inside the door of the small room, and the light from the gas overhead in the passage fell on his face.

It brought back to my mind the figure of Lohengrin as I had seen him on the gala night at Covent Garden. He took one step forward, with a wonderful look of joy, and then stood still and spoke her name:

"Suzanne! *Ma femme!*"

She answered him coldly:

"What is it you want with me?"

I heard no more than that, for I passed quickly by the lady and turned into the little hall on the left, and shut the door between them and me.

I think she stayed with him no more than ten minutes though I cannot be sure. I heard the murmur of their voices, the man's voice passionate and pleading, the woman's cold and hard. Then silence. Then the click of the latch and the shutting of my front door.

I went into the passage. Inside the room Franz von Mürren sat at my table with his head on his arms, weeping. I left him there until some time later I heard his footsteps in a stumbling way across the passage. He too went out, and my door closed again with the click of the patent catch, and I was alone with a sense of tragedy.

I have never seen Madame de Thilloy since. She left the house in the Rue de la Pompe next morning early with her boy Charles, and from the *concierge* I learned that they had gone away from Paris. I wondered whether they had gone to Tours, and hoped not. For

the sake of the bleeding heart of Franz von Mürren, German as he was, I hoped not, as well as for the soul of Suzanne de Thilloy, who once had loved him.

For her I am sure there would be no real happiness in a château at Tours with that husband's love between her and a Chasseur Alpin.

It was Armand Méricourt who told me the end of the tale when I met him a few days ago at Chartres.

He held out his hand and said, "*Comment ça va, mon vieux?*" and then invited me to an *aperitif*.

For some time we spoke of casual things. Not a word about the lady who was in both our minds.

Then abruptly he told me what I wanted most to know.

"Madame de Thilloy—you remember?—went back to her Boche husband. They are living in Italy. He fell ill in Switzerland and she nursed him back to life. I think she always loved him, even when she hated him. Women are like that."

I remembered young Charles using that phrase.

"Women are like that," he said once, making me laugh. Perhaps he had learned it from his lieutenant.

Armand Méricourt took another sip of his *aperitif*.

"It's a pity I didn't kill him in the château at Vermelles," he said in his quiet way.

I was silent, thinking of this man's devotion to Suzanne de Thilloy, and feeling sorry for him.

"Or rather," he said presently, continuing his thought,' "it's a pity he didn't kill me. I'm finished—anyhow."

We spoke no more on that subject, but talked of the war and of the peace. The lieutenant of Chasseurs Alpins cursed both with very dreadful oaths.

THE MADONNA OF THE HUNGRY CHILD

THE MADONNA OF THE HUNGRY CHILD

I HAD been in Vienna one day, and Bramber—Lieutenant Harrison K. Bramber, of the United States Army—had been there three months when we sat together one night in the Café Germania, which was the centre of "gay life" in this City of Death.

I suppose that was why Bramber did not seem interested in any way in the scene around us, but talked mostly of President Wilson and America's share in the war, while I stared about these chilly gilded rooms, studied the types of people who crowded them, and decided, not for the first time since the Armistice, that the world was mad.

I had arrived in Vienna the night before, after a disgusting journey from Trieste of a day and a half without any means of getting food, in a carriage which held fourteen people, and a train drawn by an engine which broke down several times for lack of decent coal and crawled the rest of the way. Vienna was in darkness, and out of that darkness, as I walked down a long straight street to the Schwarzenbergplatz on the way to the Hôtel Bristol, there came to me a sense of something like horror. I had known this city as the gayest capital in Europe, full of light-hearted people, elegant in their way of dress, prodigal in their spending of money, not conscious of any doom approaching their imperial state, though all was rotten underneath the surface of their prosperity. Now the streets were unlighted. Not a lamp shone upon the wet pavements. Only here and there a light glimmered through the closed shutters of the houses. It was only nine o'clock, but that long street to the Schwarzenbergplatz was empty except for single figures hurrying along in the cold drizzle of rain, and they were wretched.

A woman holding a baby to her breast stumbled against me, and, as she muttered something, I saw that she was thinly clad and shivering, and that she had sharp cheek-bones and a starved look. Two children padded past with naked feet on the sleet-swept pavements. Another spoke to me as I stopped to light a cigarette. It was a boy of fourteen or so, who held out a skinny hand to me and said, "*Bitte schön.*" By the light of my match, I saw his face peering up at me—a little white, wizened face, with bright eyes deep in sockets, like a skull with a candle inside. He wore nothing but a shirt and trousers, and his feet were naked like the others. I gave him a bit of paper money, and he fled from me as though I might want to take it back again. In the Schwarzenbergplatz, I was a little uncertain of my turning, and asked the way of a young man in a black suit. He spoke like a gentleman and directed me politely, even coming part of the way, and then, when I thanked him, lingered a moment more, hesitated, and begged for money.

"I am starving. I get a hundred and sixty kronen a week as a clerk in an office. I have not tasted meat for three years, and cabbage soup is not enough for life."

"Are there many like you ?" I asked, and he said :

"Thousands. I am not worse off than others who also starve."

I gave him something, and he thanked me effusively and shook hands ; but it was not until the next morning that I understood the meaning of a hundred and sixty kronen a week to a Viennese clerk. That was after looking in the shops and seeing that a pair of boots cost four hundred kronen, and a suit of clothes two thousand kronen, and a simple lunch of three courses in a modest-looking restaurant a hundred and fifty kronen.

That morning, before meeting Bramber, I saw other things in Vienna which made me shudder in the sunlight which had followed rain and revealed the old beauty of this city of palaces and gardens and imposing houses. I had been to St. Stephen's Church—that miracle of Gothic genius—and on the way had raised my hat seventeen times because death was passing. They were all children who were going to the grave, in little black coffins.

Then I had met Bramber, and, after a hurried handshake, he had asked me to go with him while he carried on with his job.

"What job?" I asked, and he told me he was in Vienna as one of Hoover's men, superintending relief work.

"We feed thousands of kiddies every day. Come and have a look at them. It'll do you good."

It was in the very palace that had belonged to the archduke who was killed at Serajevo—the deed that led (like a spark in gunpowder) to the great world war,—that Bramber had installed his central soup-kitchen, and here in a hall that had once rustled with the silken gowns of Austrian princesses and echoed with the laughter of life's philanderers, careless of their people, intolerant of liberty, sure of their privileges, came now thousands of boys and girls who were the victims of the war of whose guilt they, at least, were innocent. I watched them take their seats at long wooden benches, saw the hunger in their eyes, saw them get to their soup like starving animals. They were indeed starving animals and some of them were so weak that they could hardly walk, and all of them had the waxen look of wasting disease. There were many with crooked limbs and bulbous heads, and, at a question of mine, Bramber said:

"Rickets. Eighty-four per cent. of them. No bones in their bodies for lack of fats. No food as babes at their mothers' breasts. We just keep them alive with a meal a day. It's the best we can do."

That was in the day; but now, at night, after dinner, I sat in this café with Bramber, who was analysing the psychology of President Wilson—the subject was not exhausted then—while I stared at the scene about me and wondered as its meaning and could find no sense in it.

A band was playing gay music, brilliantly, loudly, with that rhythm by which an Austrian orchestra sets one's pulse beating to a quicker measure. Above this melody there rose a gabble of tongues, a high-sounding chatter of men and women in many languages. All the tables were taken by small parties or couples drinking light wines, eating pastries, and adding to the blue

clouds which rose up to the candelabra by smoking cigarettes or cigars over black coffee and iced water. Such gaiety, such laughter, such flirtations of pretty ladies, such gorging and guzzling in a city beleaguered by starvation!

Paper money was fluttering into waiters' hands in sheaves. I noticed how Bramber's pocket-book bulged with this paper and what a wad of it he used to pay for one bottle of Niersteiner before he left it lying carelessly on the table beside him.

All around us, other men seemed to have unlimited supplies of this dirty money, though the Viennese clerk who had begged of me earned a hundred and sixty kronen a week. Who were these men? Some of them—proclaimed themselves by their uniforms—English, American, French, Italian—officers, mostly entertaining Austrian girls, who seemed to speak every European language with equal ease. Others were Slavs of a kind—Czechs, Slovaks, Serbians—all those people of the new states carved out of the old body of the Austrian Empire. There were American Jews who had come here to trade on the exchange, and Italian travellers who were buying up Austrian businesses, and young Austrian merchants and financiers who somehow had played the game of profiteering even though their country was engulfed in ruin. So I guessed, trying to read the character of all these faces, trying to understand the contrast of this life in the café and that death I had seen passing in the streets outside.

"These Austrians seem happy enough," I said to Bramber. "They're not worrying, to judge by all this din and chatter. How those girls keep stuffing down that beastly pastry!"

Bramber had been talking about the economic effects of war on American social life, but now he glanced round the café and answered me with special reference to the Austrian girls, whose beauty, in this place, at any rate, had not been damaged by the ruin of the empire.

"That beastly pastry is probably the first solid food some of them have had to-day. That's what they've come for. That's why they're flirting with foreign officers. A little love in return for a square meal!"

I said, "Good God!" and did not hear much of Bramber's further discourse on American economics, but watched those pretty girls with hair like fine-spun gold who were laughing with bright eyes at English, French and Italian officers, Jews of many countries, Slavs of Middle Europe, while they drank light wine and consumed squares of Viennese pastry. Here and there I noticed some of these girls were with their own brothers and people. They were not eating pastry, but sitting with empty coffee-cups, sipping iced water, listening to gay music, and getting a little warmth of life without much cost. And then I saw a girl who afterwards came into Bramber's life and mine in a strange, pitiful way.

I was not the only man in the room who saw a tall, charming-looking girl come into the café alone. I noticed that, at the table next to me, two young English officers glanced at her with sudden interest, as though she were different from the others here. In a way, she was different, though she was of the same type as many of them, with the very light gold hair which is common and beautiful among Viennese women, and delicate features, with rather full lips, which one sees in old portraits of patrician ladies in flowered gowns, as they still hang in the Hofburg, though the palace of the emperors is now used by the officers and clerks of the Inter-national Reparation Committee.

The girl was different, because more obviously of the aristocratic type than others here who belonged to the bourgeoisie and shop-girl class. She was different, too, because, as she came into the café alone, a sudden look of stage fright, an extreme shyness in the presence of this crowd seemed to overcome her, so that she faltered before coming forward from the swinging doors, looked back at them as though thinking of instant retreat, while a wave of hot colour swept into her face, which before had been very pale, with a milky pallor.

I saw her gaze swiftly round the big hall, perhaps searching for an empty seat, and then slip into a chair at the end of a table where several Italian officers were sitting. They had no women with them and were busy with some card game, but looked over their cards at this girl with insolent, appraising eyes. One of them,

the oldest man of the group, swung round in his chair a little and smiled at her. She was facing me, and I saw that the colour had left her face again and that only her lips were red, though not rouged, like so many smiling lips in this room, as I could tell later, when I sat nearer to her. She sat quite still, with her eyes fixed on the marble table, and I was struck by the white purity of her face, by its spiritual look in this place of light music and lighter love.

Bramber saw my eyes straying and said:

"Do you see someone you know?" Then he saw the girl who had just come in, and I could see that some distress stirred him when he spoke. "For the love of Mike!"

"Do you know her?" I asked, and he nodded. "She's extraordinarily pretty," I said. "Beautiful, even, like a Raphael Madonna."

Bramber flicked the end of his cigar off the table.

"I hate to see her here. It's hellish!"

He spoke with a kind of passion which surprised me.

"Why shouldn't she be here?" I asked.

He stared at me through his tortoise-shell glasses in an angry way, as though I had said a stupid thing, which was the truth, as I now know.

"That girl's a lady. I mean, she's too good for this place. This is a market-place. The girls who come here sell their love for a mess of pottage, pay for free dinners with their kisses. It's horrible to think of. Makes me go sick that such things should happen in civilised countries."

"Frightful," I acknowledged. "And all these girls look so nice, so decent."

Bramber groaned.

"Once as nice as your sister and mine, who don't live in a starving city."

He looked across at the girl. The Italian officer who had swung round in his chair to smile at her had edged nearer and said something with amorous eyes.

"Hell!" growled Bramber, in a low voice.

I saw him flush with anger and get up from his chair.

"Do you mind if I ask her over here?" he asked, in his grave, polite way. "I had an introduction to

her family, and have a high regard for her mother. They're people of good class."

"I'd like to meet her," I told him, and he nodded and strode over to the table where she was sitting, and I heard him say, "*Guten Abend, gnädiges Fräulein,*" in his best German.

I am sure she did not expect to see Bramber there, and was abashed at seeing him. A shamed look came upon her face, and she lowered her eyes before him for a moment before giving him her hand. He spoke again to her for a moment or two, but I could not hear what he said. The Italian officer was glaring at him savagely, and for a moment, my attention was diverted by one of the waiters, who came to my table, missing Bramber, and said, "*Bezahlen, bitte,*" asking for payment of the bottle of wine, which had already been paid. I was sure of that, for I had seen Bramber take out a wad of notes, as I have said, from the pocket-book which still lay on the table where he had left it after paying. By the time I had convinced the man that I was not so simple as he thought, Bramber stood in front of me again, with the tall girl by his side, and I rose to bow to her.

He gave me her name.

"The Fräulein Anna von Freystadt."

She held out her hand, a delicate, fragile hand which seemed very tiny in my grasp, and said something in good English before taking a seat at our table.

"You will have some chocolate?" asked Bramber. "And perhaps a cake or two?"

"You are very kind," said Fräulein Anna. "It is some time since I dined."

Bramber and I glanced at each other. I am sure we were both thinking of the same thing. Was it to-day or yesterday that she had dined? And was it cabbage soup, or bread and potatoes, strictly rationed?

She showed no sign of hunger when the cakes came, but, while she sipped her chocolate, played with them a little, taking tiny morsels.

Bramber remarked on that and begged her to eat something, as it was long since dinner, and a cold night.

The girl laughed, and I liked the sound of her laughter, which was soft and low.

"I am not really hungry, and it would be greediness to eat otherwise in these hard times, like all the people here."

"It's a pity to waste the cakes for that reason," said Bramber, trying in his simple way to camouflage his belief that she was in need of food.

"That is true," she answered. "I will take them home to my babies," and, so saying, put three little cakes in a bag which she wore round her wrist.

"'Babies?'" I asked.

"My little brothers and sisters. There are five of them, and all greedy."

"I hope your mother is well?" asked Bramber gravely. "It is three weeks since I had the pleasure of calling on her,and she complained a little of weakness."

"Poor mother!" said Fräulein Anna. "She is always thinking how to make a little money buy a lot of things. But the things cost more every day, and the money grows less. That makes her ill."

"Yes," said Bramber; "I understand. It's all very difficult."

For a moment or two there was silence, and, to my embarrassment, I saw tears well up into the girl's eyes, tremble on her lashes, and fall down her cheeks.

She touched her eyes with a little lace handkerchief, and then spoke to me.

"You come to an unhappy country, sir. Austria is dying. Our men have no hope, and it is worse for the women and children, who can do nothing but pray to the good God who afflicts us for many sins."

"Does God hear those prayers?" I asked. It seemed a brutal thing to say, yet I did not mean it brutally, but with a great pity.

"We hope for mercy," answered the girl, and, as she said that there was a look on her face which I have seen on the faces of nuns when war has surged round them with all its horrors. "He will forgive our sins," she said again, "because of our suffering."

It was strange talk in a café where a Viennese orchestra was playing ragtime, and where men of many nations were drinking too much wine and giving too much to hungry girls.

I noticed this girl's clothes. In 1914, or perhaps later, they had been new and fine. Now they were rather threadbare, and too thin, anyhow, for this autumn weather in Vienna with a wind that cut one.

She spoke of England and of English people whom I knew. Her memories of my country were of her schoolgirl days, when she had been very happy. So happy that, even in remembrance, her face lighted up, and she had a new touch of beauty, which I found most charming. Bramber, too, I could see, was moved in his rather hard, cautious way by the girl's personality. I saw how he studied her through his eye-glasses with those shrewd grey eyes of his, and how now and then a look of pity or approval crept into them.

Once, when, after some silence among us, she looked round at the café, at the drinking men and laughing girls—some of them were dancing now—I saw her shudder a little and put her hands up to her throat as though she were stifling, and after that all the cheerfulness left her, and she sat with a look of tragedy before rising and saying:

"I must go home."

"I will take you home," said Bramber, "if you will wait a second while I pay."

Then he said, "Hello!" and lifted up the tray to find his pocket-book. It was not to be found. Somebody had stolen it. That waiter whom I had refused to pay a second time had perhaps helped himself. So I suggested to Bramber, though I told him I could not accuse the man.

Bramber pooh-poohed the incident.

"It may do him a bit of good, poor wretch! You must pay to-night."

Anna von Freystadt looked distressed.

"It is dangerous to leave money about in Vienna," she said.

"My fault," said Bramber. "And, anyhow, it doesn't matter."

I paid, sorting out some of the filthy bits of paper, and then we passed out of the Café Germania, standing by a moment to make way for an exodus of other men and women—Austrian girls with foreign officers and foreign

civilians. Some of the girls swayed a little and clutched the arms of their cavaliers when they came into the cold night air. They had drunk too much light wine. Others walked off quickly up the dark street with single men. "Like my sister and yours," Bramber had said, and I thought over that phrase with a kind of pain in my heart.

With Anna von Freystadt we went pass the Hôtel Bristol, turned up the Kärtnerstrasse, and came to a little street on the left-hand side called the Königingasse. We were all silent, Bramber only speaking a word or two now and then. Anna von Freystadt bent her head to the sharp wind, so wet and cold. In her little thin jacket and threadbare skirt, she had no armour against the sword of that wind, but when Bramber offered her his coat, she shook her head. She slipped her hand through his arm in a friendly way, and I think this embarrassed him a good deal, for he was as shy a fellow as I have known. He held his arm with that girl's hand upon it as stiffly as a poker.

We stopped outside one of those big stone-faced mansions which, in Vienna, are divided into apartments for well-to-do people. Before the war, the elegant world lived in such places—smart young bachelors, newly arrived couples related to the higher aristocracy, professional families in the outer circle of Court society.

"Do not trouble to come upstairs," said Anna von Freystadt, when we entered the courtyard. "I thank you a thousand times."

But we conducted her upstairs to an apartment on the third floor.

The door was opened by a young girl of sixteen or so, remarkably like Anna, and clearly at first glance her sister. She held an oil-lamp which shone on her face, as pretty as a miniature by Richard Cosway.

She gave a little cry of joy.

"Oh, Anna! You have come back, then! I was terribly afraid."

Those words were spoken, of course, in German, and, saying them, she flung her arms about Anna's neck and kissed her face and wept.

What had the child been afraid of? Why did she greet her sister as though she had escaped some fearful

thing? And why did Anna speak sharply to her and say: "Hush! Do you not see these gentlemen, Röslein?"

Bramber said, "Good evening, Miss Rose," and kissed the child's hand. Then hurriedly he said good night, and together we went down the stone stairs to the courtyard again, while Anna von Freystadt held the lamp over the staircase to give us light, and called out again in her sweet voice:

"We thank you a thousand times!"

Bramber came back with me to the Hôtel Bristol, where we parted at the door. On the way, I asked him about Anna and her family, but he did not tell me much—only that the father had died during the war, and that they were very poor now, and that the mother was ill and not strong enough to look after her family.

On the steps of the Bristol, where an English sentry was on guard, as it was the headquarters of the British mission, I spoke to Bramber again about his lost pocketbook.

"Do you think it was the waiter?" I asked him.

"Some poor devil who saw a good chance and took it," said Bramber.

"Did you lose much?"

"A few hundred kronen. Ten dollars or so at exchange rates. I'm not worrying."

When I went up to my room in the Hôtel Bristol, I wondered if he guessed what I knew. It was Anna von Freystadt who had taken the money. I was almost certain of that. I had seen her glance at the pocketbook when she first sat down. A little later I saw her cover it with her muff. I think she stole it just when we were talking about the mercy of God. It was after that she fell silent, and sat with such a tragic look. Perhaps, at first, she did not know it was Bramber's purse, but imagined that some stranger had left it lying there, and in her heart had said what is the Austrian way of saying, "Findings are keepings." But when Bramber had searched for the money, she had not confessed, but said with a look of distress, "It is dangerous to leave money about in Vienna."

I could not get the thought of this girl out of my head that night, but lay awake pondering over her beauty,

her character, this almost certain theft. Why had she gone to that café? "A market-place," as Bramber had called it. She had entered it as a Christian girl might have gone into the Colosseum on a day of sacrifice, with wild beasts awaiting for her flesh. That child Röslein, had she known that Anna had gone out that night with some desperate intent, for the sake of those whom she called her babies? I went to the window of my bedroom, and stared out into the darkness of Vienna, so silent, so dismal, so haunted with the horror of tragedy. No noise came up from those dark streets, except when, as I listened, I heard some padding footsteps below my window in the Königingasse, and a woman's voice wailed up to me, "*Ach, Gott in Himmel!*"

God in heaven, and, below, a world of human agony!

I met Anna von Freystadt the next day in the twilight of the old Gothic church—the Stephan *Kirche*—which lured me irresistibly because of its wonderful carving, in which the fantasy of the Middle Ages is revealed in stone, so that even the exterior of the church is alive with strange birds and beasts, angels and devils, and human faces which, no doubt, were portraits of the craftsman's friends, whimsical, full of character—sinners and saints.

When I stepped into the church, I found it crowded with people though it was in the middle of a week-day morning. They were kneeling on the stone floors before the high altar, or in the side chapels, where candles were lighted round statues of saints and martyrs.

Not much light crept through the old painted windows, for the day was dark outside, and in the church there was a deep gloom through which the candles gleamed in little spheres of radiance, while the golden shrines and the thread of embroidered banners and tall gilt candlesticks glinted, as the candle-light touched them, like sparks.

I looked at the people who were praying, and was shocked by the misery of them. They were people sharply pinched by long-endured hunger. The merest glance told one that without any kind of doubt. These women with gaunt faces, sharp cheek-bones, waxen skin, seemed to have no flesh at all upon the creaking framework of their bodies. As they held up their hands

in prayer, fixedly devout, in almost trancelike state, I saw their scraggy arms from which their shawls fell away—mere skeletons with the covering of skin and tissue. Young mothers were there with their babies, who cried ceaselessly, with thin, miserable wailing. I glanced at some of those babies and then kept my eyes off them. They were hardly human, but like little shrunken monkeys, covered with sores.

I noticed that there was a continual coming and going before a picture of the south transept. It was a picture of the Madonna and Child, before which a tiny red lamp was burning. Many women kneeled there, and a procession of men, women and children came to say some prayer and then pass on.

Seeing me looking at the picture, an old Austrian gentleman who was standing beside me spoke to me in English.

"We call it the 'Madonna of the Hungry Child.' You see how the Infant Jesus seems thin and ailing. It is very old, and the people here have a great devotion for it."

The old man made the sign of the cross and then passed on, while I studied the picture. Yes: what he said was true. The Child Jesus was painted peaky, under-sized, and wizened-looking, like so many of the children now round me. But the face of the Madonna interested me. It was beautifully painted in a primitive way, with every golden hair distinct. Where had I seen that face? Its delicate look, with a milky-white skin and red lips? Then I thought of Anna von Freystadt. It was extraordinarily like her—the same type, the same spiritual, pathetic look. As I thought so, I started with a touch of surprise, for there, quite close to me, knelt the girl herself. Her hands were clasped together and her face was raised, and the light of some candles on the altar put a glamour about that golden hair of hers, so that she looked very saintlike, like a mediæval painting, like this picture before which she prayed. She gave a deep, quivering sigh, lowered her head, and then put the back of her hands across her eyes, which had filled with tears.

I moved away, tiptoed round the church, and went out, thinking I should avoid her by that time. But

in the porch we came face to face, and she said, "Good morning," blushing a little at this encounter. We passed out into the street together, and, as she was walking my way, we went together.

We spoke of the Madonna of the Hungry Child, and I told her how like she was to the picture. That startled her. I think it even frightened her a little, for some reason, and she confessed to me that she had seen this likeness herself, or fancied it. For that reason, she told me, she liked to say her prayers before it, believing that the Madonna might hear them and answer them, and understand the sadness that was in her heart.

"Are you always sad?" I asked rather foolishly, and she rebuked me with her answer.

"Is it easy to be otherwise when one sees one's country ruined and one's people dying? You see—there is another who is dead."

She glanced to the roadway where a funeral passed, followed on foot by black-garbed men and women.

Later, during our walk, she spoke of her family. It was when I asked her about her babies.

"I'm fighting for their lives," she told me, "against the wolf who howls at the door. So far, I have kept the beast out, but not easily. Now little Friedrich is ill again; I think the wolf will take him soon."

That talk of the wolf, by this pretty girl who walked with me, sent a kind of shiver down my spine.

"Is little Friedrich the youngest?" I asked her. And she nodded and said:

"Two years older than the war."

"What's the matter with him?"

She turned and smiled at me, as though amused at my simplicity.

"What is the matter with the children of Vienna? They cannot get milk or fat or meat. They have been under-nourished since their birth, as victims of war."

I spoke of the soup-kitchens which Bramber had organised. Were they no good to save the children?

"They are for the very poor," she answercd. "We are high born folk. My mother would rather die—would rather little Friedrich died—than let her child be fed on public charity."

"That is pride," I said.

"Yes, that is pride. My mother keeps it still. It is her last possession."

"And you?"

"I have none left. I would go down in the dirt for the sake of the little ones."

I asked her to take luncheon with me, and I think she was tempted, for she hesitated before answering, but then refused.

"The children are waiting for me. But perhaps we shall meet to-night. My sister and I are going to spend the evening with Lieutenant Bramber. He wrote to us last night, and my Röslein is delighted."

"I've not been asked yet," I told her. "But I should like to come."

"Come," she said, and then she left me to go to her house.

Bramber and I met at luncheon, for he came to the Bristol to see our high commissioner, and on his way out invited me to spend the evening with him.

"Those two girls may look in," he added, as an afterthought. "There will be a kind of supper going."

He scribbled his address on a card and gave it to me. I promised to be there at eight, and when I went, half an hour late because of work that kept me busy, the two girls were already there and supper was ready.

Bramber had rooms of his own in a private house, and they were charmingly furnished in old-fashioned style, with brocade-covered chairs and gilt mirrors, and candelabra corresponding perhaps to the Louis XVI period in France. But here and there the American had put knick-knacks of his own, family photographs, a silver tobacco-box, and things he had bought in Europe, I guess, such as a miniature of Marie Antoinette in a little oval frame set with diamonds, and a Mercury from Pompeii. These things I noticed by a trick of mind which makes me study the surroundings of the people I meet almost subconsciously, due, perhaps, to a journalistic training. I saw, also, that Anna von Freystadt was wearing a charming frock of rose-coloured silk, cut low at the shoulders so that it showed her white neck, and

that Röslein, her little sister, was in a frock which she had outgrown during the years of war.

Bramber seemed pleased in his quiet way, and his eyes puckered up with an amused smile when Röslein, like a child, clapped her hands at the vision of a round of cold beef which an Austrian maid brought to table, and cried, "Wünderschön!"

"We have not seen such a thing since father died," said Anna, and she accused Bramber, not seriously, of a crime, common enough in Vienna, as I found, by the name of *Schleichhandlung*, which means smuggling, by buying food from the farmers outside the city at fantastic prices and contrary to the laws of rationing.

"It's good American," said Bramber. "I got it from our army stores, and they won't miss it, I guess."

Anna hardly touched this meat or any part of the little banquet provided by Bramber. I think she had schooled herself to live on very little, and by this austerity of training had broken her appetite, like men and women hunger-striking for conscience's sake. But Röslein was frankly hungry and made no disguise of her joy at getting such sumptuous fare. The only thing that troubled her now and then, between spells of excellent work with knife and fork, was the thought that Maria, Gretchen, and little Friedrich, her brothers and sisters, were not sharing the feast. So she told me in a whisper, lest Bramber should hear and think her rude.

I confess I fell in love at once with little Rose. She was but a child, as beautiful as the flower by which she was named, as graceful as a little princess when she dropped her curtsy to me in the Austrian way, as clear and candid as sunlit water. After the supper, when she gave a sigh of utter satisfaction—and indeed she had not put a curb on her appetite—she sat with me in the window-seat while her sister played the piano to Bramber. There she talked to me in a low voice, with the manner of a child and the wisdom of an old, old woman. I remember some of the things she said, and they were tragic things.

"Anna," she said, "is looking for a lover. Do you think Lieutenant Bramber is in love with her?"

"I don't know," I told her. "Why is she looking for a lover?"

Röslein glanced over at her sister with a look of adoration.

"Not for her own sake," she went on, twisting her little white fingers. "Oh, no! Not for her own sake, because she does not like men. She would rather be a nun in a convent. But it is for our sake that she is looking for a lover."

"Why for your sake?"

"To keep us, you know. To buy food and clothes for mother and Maria and Gretchen and little Friedrich and me."

"Don't you have enough food, and clothes to wear?"

"Oh, no! Never enough. Cabbage soup; potato soup. They keep one thin, and the little ones are often ill, and mother has no strength. You see, we are gentlefolk. We cannot beg, or do rough work, like the poor people. And the relief societies do not help us for that reason. So it is very difficult, and Anna is miserable."

"So that is why she wants a lover?"

"Yes; that is the easiest way. All the girls we know try to get lovers—English officers, Italian, French, American—who have lots of money. Some of them are good—the girls, I mean—but others are very bad. There is always a good way and a bad way of making love."

"Anna does not like either way, you say?"

"No. She hates love—that kind of love. She is a saint, and saints don't approve of love—in that way. But she is so brave that she would sacrifice herself for us. Sometimes I am afraid——"

"Afraid of what?"

"I'm afraid that Anna may sacrifice herself in a bad way to some bad man. She loves us so much and is so brave and good that she would do anything to help us. And that makes me afraid."

I thought of something Anna von Freystadt had said to me. It was when I asked her about her pride. "I have none left," she said. "I would go down in the dirt for the sake of the little ones."

I asked Röslein a question that surprised her.

"Is that why you were afraid when she went to the Café Germania?"

The child looked up at me in a startled way, and then dropped her head.

"Yes. I was afraid when she went there. It is not a good place."

I was silent for a while, listening to Anna playing a reverie by Chopin, beautifully.

"I hope your sister won't go to that place again," I said. "I don't think it would be pleasing to the Madonna of the Hungry Child."

Röselin was amazed when I said that, opening her eyes very wide.

"How do you know that?" she asked. "Did Anna tell you of her devotion to the Madonna of the Hungry Child?"

"She did not tell me, but I saw her praying."

"She prays there so that we may have food enough, and all hungry children."

It was then that Röslein put her hand on mine and her face close to mine, and whispered a question which I could not answer.

"Do you think Mr. Bramber is in love with Anna? He is very rich, I think, and we should all be saved if he married Anna. Is there any hope of that?"

I wondered, and looked over at Bramber standing behind the girl as she played the piano. The hard lines of his face had softened. There was a kind of tenderness in his grey eyes as he listened to that music into which sadness crept. The girl played well, put something of her soul into this melody of Chopin, so that old Bramber, as I called him, was profoundly touched. I answered Röslein's question in a doubtful way.

"I think he likes your sister. Not more than that, perhaps."

Röslein seemed sorry that I did not speak more certainly, and whispered again that Anna might be glad to have him for a lover, though she did not like love.

Strange talk in a room in Vienna with this child of sixteen, and a strange and dreadful happening at the

end of the evening, which made me go sick and white for a moment.

Bramber was making coffee in a little copper pot, and Röslein was arranging four little cups and saucers on a side-table. Anna had left the piano and was wandering about the room, looking at Bramber's photographs and knick-knacks. I was sitting back in a low armchair, smoking and glancing through a book of coloured prints. Suddenly I looked up, and in a gilt-framed mirror saw Anna von Freystadt. She was standing by the mantel-shelf, and held something in her hand, and put it quickly into a little pocket of her rose-coloured gown. Not so quickly that I failed to see the shape and the glitter of it. It was Bramber's miniature of Marie Antoinette set in diamonds. It was the second time I had seen this girl as a thief.

"Coffee ready!" said Bramber.

It was real coffee, not the *Ersatz* stuff made from corn or beans of sorts, and the two girls expressed amazement at such a gift, and the fragrance of it was like incense to Röslein. Only by a slightly increased pallor did Anna von Freystadt show any twinge of conscience for the thing she had done, which lay hidden in the pocket of that rose-coloured gown. Then, presently, we took them home, and again outside her door the elder sister gave a thousand thanks to Bramber, while Röslein dropped her little Court curtsy and said, "It has been like heaven!"

In the street, I spoke to Bramber, abruptly, of the thing I had seen in the mirror.

"Look here. There's something you ought to know, old man. While you were making the coffee for those two girls, the elder of them—that strange and beautiful lady, the Fräulein Anna—stole your Marie Antoinette miniature."

"Is that so?" he answered, as calmly as though I had accused her of taking a pin.

"And, what is more," I said, "I am certain she took your pocket-book the other night."

"Yes," said Bramber; "I think there's no doubt about that."

I was astonished by the way he spoke, by his refusal

to be surprised or shocked. He gave me the key to his inner thoughts when he groaned in a pitiful way and said :

" Poor child ! Poor creature ! To think that women in a great city like this are so besieged by the devil of poverty that stealing seems the smallest sin, almost like a virtue compared with what most of them have to do to keep themselves alive and feed their families. Civilisation ! For the love of Mike ! Where does one find it in Europe after the war ? "

" But this girl," I said. " You have given her food at your table. She was your guest. There is something revolting in her act after your kindness."

" True," said Bramber ; " it's frightful. But, somehow, I can only pity her. Women in Vienna are in a beleaguered city. They have only a gambler's chance of escape from starvation and disease. They must use desperate measures to escape. They must sell every blessed thing they have—their beauty and their souls—when the enemy closes round them, bars every other door of escape. Besides, this girl Anna did not steal for herself. It was for her family. I know that. I've been to her home. I've seen its genteel misery. The boy Friedrich is in consumption. The mother is dying, slowly, but quite surely, for lack of proper nourishment. The little Gretchen, as pretty as Röslein, waits for food thicker than cabbage soup with a little black bread, and not always that. You see, they belong to the middle classes, and that is more miserable than the labouring class, though that is dying, too, just now."

" But it's better to beg," I argued. " This girl might have asked you to lend her money."

" That's true," he said. " I should be willing to do so. But what price do you think most men put on a loan to a pretty girl here in Vienna ? She's afraid of that. If I lent her money, she's afraid I'd claim her love. That frightens her most of all. Seems the biggest degradation."

I thought of what Röslein had told me about her sister. She did not like the love of men, yet wanted to find a lover.

I told that to Bramber and he said again :

"Poor child! Poor lady! She goes unwillingly to sacrifice."

"So you will let her keep the miniature," I asked, "and sell its diamonds?"

Bramber nodded.

"In Vienna it will only fetch a few dollars—everybody's selling their trinkets—and those dollars will buy some smuggled meat for Frau von Freystadt and for little Friedrich and Gretchen with the pigtail. Good night, laddie."

So we parted outside the Bristol again, and I watched Bramber stride off into the darkness, and the admiration I had had for him deepened because of his fine charity and great pity.

Anna von Freystadt did not sell the miniature of Marie Antoinette. She gave it to me to give back to Bramber. That was two days later, when I was in my room at the Bristol. The hall-porter, who seems to speak every known tongue, and English perfectly, told me that a lady had called several times to see me, and now was waiting in the reading-room. When I asked her name, he said:

"The Fräulein von Freystadt," and added: "Her father was chamberlain at the old court before Austria went to the devil."

She was sitting in the reading-room, with her hands in her lap and her head drooping, but when I came in she rose and spoke quickly.

"May I speak to you—privately?"

There were other people in the reading-room—English officers of the British mission, and the French military attaché, so I asked her to come up to my own little sitting-room on the third floor.

"Can I be of any service to you?" I asked, when I had shut the door and offered her a chair.

She did not take the chair, but fumbled in her pocket and brought out the miniature.

"I stole this from Mr. Bramber," she said. "Perhaps he has not discovered his loss yet. I should be glad if you could get it back to him before he finds out."

She spoke quite calmly, in a matter-of-fact way, and then suddenly wept with violence, her whole body shaken.

I tried to soothe her by gentle words, and presently she calmed down a little and told me that she had stolen the miniature to buy condensed milk and things for little Friedrich, but he had died in the night, and would not need it any more. She had been wicked to take the miniature. Perhaps that was why little Friedrich had died after all her prayers to the Madonna.

After that she became a little hysterical, I thought, and wept again, and cried out:

"Is there no mercy for us? Must all our little ones in Vienna wither away to death? They cannot build coffins for them fast enough, and all my prayers go unheard."

"There are people in Vienna," I told her, "who want to help. Thousands of children are being fed each day by international relief committees."

"There are thousands who are not fed," she answered miserably.

"It's hard to find them all," I said, "and food is scarce in Europe; but if money can buy it, you need not worry any more about the way of getting it. For your own family, I mean. Bramber and I will see to that, if you will let us."

"It is too late!" she cried. "Little Friedrich is dead!"

"Not too late for Gretchen and Röslein and Maria and your mother, and you," I told her.

The girl was weak and ill. When I walked back with her to her house, she had to hold my arm; I thought she would faint in the street. It was a weakness which was shared, I was told, by many women in Vienna, who for five years had been underfed, not by sharp and absolute starvation, but by that long time of dearth in which they had kept alive by substitute foods, chemical products, cabbage soup, meagre, fatless rations.

Two days later, I saw another of those little coffins passing which so often passed through the streets of Vienna, and as I raised my hat I knew that it was little Friedrich's body that was going to the grave.

A group of mourners, mostly women and children, were following afoot, and I saw Anna von Freystadt and Röslein walking with them through the sleet and rain.

It was the last time I saw the girl whose face was so like the picture of that Madonna in the church of St. Stephen, for I had to leave Vienna on other business as a student of the world after the war. But I left something with Bramber to share in any help that might be given to this lady—to one family at least in a city of despair.

It was Bramber who, in a recent letter, gave me the latest news about them. It was good news, which gladdened me.

You will be interested to hear, (he wrote in his dry way,) *that Fräulein Anna von Freystadt and her sister Röslein are in charge of a feeding-centre for middle-class children. I managed to work that, and it has made a deal of difference to them. They get regular meals, and kronen enough each week to keep their mother and sisters in fair comfort. The elder sister—you remember her ?—is very happy in her job. Her devotion is wonderful and untiring. The people, for some reason, call her the "Madonna of the Hungry Child." Röslein and I are great pals.*

That was all, but enough to give a touch of sunshine to the tragic gloom of my remembrance of a city in which death was reaping so great a harvest after war, and of a girl whose heart was so stricken by misery that she had been tempted beyond her strength, because of her unselfish love.

A CHÂTEAU IN PICARDY

A CHÂTEAU IN PICARDY

When Bertrand Holt, my friend, invited me to join him in a sentimental pilgrimage, by way of a motor-car from Paris to the fields of the Somme, where he and I had lived—while others died—in the years of war, I had no notion that he was drawn that way by a stronger lure than the desire to visit old scenes in which he had played a brave part, to walk among a world of ghosts—his pals and mine—whose spirit of youth haunted every yard of this earth of France, and to shake hands again, perhaps, with some of those women and girls in villages behind the old front line among whom he had been billeted with his battalion.

Looking back on that month we spent in Picardy, I see now that it was a living presence rather than memories and ghosts which he went out to find. His sentimental pilgrimage was through rusty iron gates which led through a grass-grown avenue of beeches to a little white château in Picardy, and to a girl who lived there.

From what Holt has told me in quiet hours when two friends talk without spiritual camouflage, I fancy he was not aware in any intellectual and reasoned way of this feminine attraction which made him steer an erratic course for that particular village behind the Somme. More than a year had passed since the war, and during all that time he had never written a line to this French girl with whom he had flirted a little when he was billeted in the *estaminet* at her château gates. I doubt whether he had given a conscious thought to her in all those months. Like thousands of other young officers, he had gone back to civil life restlessly at first, sick of war but not satisfied with peace. He had had to struggle like so many other young men of his age and class to find a job, and though he was an excellent machine-gunner, he was utterly untrained in any technical

knowledge that might be applied to the business of peace.

Between periods of searching round London for profitable employment he had lived at home with his people in Sussex, and found that old country house too cramped and its intellectual outlook stifling. He had had two or three amorous adventures with girls who played tennis in the neighbourhood, and had drifted into an engagement with one of them, whom he afterwards described to me callously as owl-like in stupidity. He broke that affair just after getting, by a fluke of luck, a partnership in a motor-car agency in Paris; and it was in the Avenue Victor Hugo, where he managed the Paris branch of the business keenly and successfully, that I met this comrade of mine with whom I had once walked in strange, abominable ways.

Not once in our long talks of those memories did he mention the lady of the château in Picardy. I do not think that even then, a week before our trip, he was conscious of her place in his imagination. My theory is that her image lingered in what psychologists call in their jargon the subconscious or subliminal self, and that this girl's face and personality, which had once touched his spirit, gradually deepened their influence in the area of sub-consciousness until they became a real and dominating cause of desire in his being. Perhaps it was some accidental and immediate association of ideas which wakened this latent memory, the coming of spring to Paris recalling springtime on the Somme, when Bertrand Holt had seen the petals of cherry blossoms blown about the steel hats of men marching through beauty to the fields of death; or the flower-baskets outside the Madeleine bringing a sudden, intense reminder of an old French garden where once he had walked with a pretty girl; when daffodils grew in the long grass and bluebells wove a carpet in the copse behind the château, and this girl made a daisy chain and twined it round his khaki cap.

Anyhow, it was an abrupt decision of his to get away from Paris for a spell—he had earned a holiday by hard work and good business—and he gave me no more than a couple of hours to pack a bag and join him.

Overwork and ill-health made me glad of this chance.

Anything to escape from the roar of Paris and the nagging of business worries.

So we began our journey over old battlefields, and I remember Holt's morbid interest in the mangled earth—now flower-strewn—which he had seen upheaved by shell-fire and blasted into unnatural chaos; his emotional silences in graveyards, where many comrades lay as victims of that war to end war—oh, god of irony!—his shrinkings and escapes from tourists, with their loud talk and their awful enjoyment of ghoulish things; and his study of France's desperate effort to bring back life to those devastated regions where peasants ploughed fields stuffed with unexploded shells, and—lacking water, light and fuel—had lived through a miserable winter in wooden shanties set up among the ruins of their villages, or on plots of earth where not even ruins marked the sites of their former habitations.

As he sat at the wheel of his car Holt raged against the folly of the war, the crime of it, the utter idiocy of mankind, the futility of force as a moral argument, the failure of peace, the anarchy of Europe—due, as he believed, to the revolt of common people against the rulers who had made this war possible. Then for a long time he was silent, and did not speak again until we were on the south side of Amiens. I remember his words now, because they gave the key to the impulse which had led him on this journey. "It's a funny thing," he said in his boyish way, "but I have a feeling that something is going to happen to me."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked him, surprised by a queer thrill in his voice as he spoke those words.

"Can't explain it," he said, "but I feel excited at the prospect of getting to that village over there. Ever since I left Paris I've been thinking of the place—a sort of fixed idea."

I looked across the fields and saw the spire of a church above a belt of trees.

"What's the name of it?" I asked, and he said, "Maresquel."

I remember the place vaguely as one of the innumerable villages behind the fighting lines in which British troops had been billeted.

"Don't you remember?" said Bertrand Holt. "My battalion was there in the spring of '16, and afterwards in '18. Our H.Q. was in the *estaminet* called La Fleur des Champs—the Flower of the Fields! It didn't smell very flowerlike. I remember the manure heap in the yard and the smell of pigs. It was kept by Madame—yes, by Madame Berthoult, a sturdy soul. She used to tell us about her son Jean. He was wounded at Souchez, and again at Verdun."

"There was a château near by," I said, groping in my memory.

"That's right," said Holt. "It belongs—or did then—to the Comte de Maresquel. He used to let us shoot his rabbits. He had a daughter. Let's see—what was her name?"

He seemed to be puzzling for the girl's name, and he went on driving for quite a minute or two before it seemed to come into his head again. Then he laughed and said, "By Jove, Yvonne! That was her name! I remember I used to think it very pretty. Yvonne de Maresquel. Like music, I thought then. Most of our fellows were rather sweet on her. You know how it was in time of war."

"Where you sweet on her?" I asked.

He did not answer that question for a second. He seemed to be groping back in his mind. Then he answered quite frankly: "I think I was, rather—in a sort of way. She used to paint our portraits in water-colours, and I remember I was jealous of young Waterhouse, because she made him so good-looking and asked him to give her half a dozen sittings. When we moved up into Flanders I wrote to her once or twice, and had answers from her. Then the big drive happened—the three great months—and then the Armistice. After that she went clean out of my mind. I couldn't think of her name until a minute ago."

"My lad," I said in a chaffing way, "I guess you're right about that feeling of yours—the something-going-to-happen idea. It seems to me you're picking up the threads of an old love affair."

"I wonder if it's that?" he answered seriously. It's a queer thing that, though I couldn't think of

the girl's name, not for the life of me, her face has been travelling all the way with me from Paris. I keep seeing the way she used to laugh when I made some mistake in French."

"You're in for it," I told him. "It's the effect of spring on your youthful blood."

"Association of ideas, that's all," he said. "I expect she's married by now; and anyhow, I'm no catch for the daughter of a French count."

That conversation happened along the road, within a few minutes of our arrival at the little inn called the Flower of the Fields, where Holt put his motor-car up against the wall, and then walked into the courtyard.

"Same old place!" he said; and then taking in a deep breath: "Same old stink!"

He stood glancing round with a smile at the midden in the centre of the courtyard, at the pigs nosing among the rubbish heaps, at the pump where many a time he had washed, at the wooden shed where his company used to sleep on damp straw, at the harness room which was once an orderly room, and at the casement window from which he used to look out when he was adjutant of his battalion, having to deal with all the orders that came down from divisional headquarters. Loud laughter had often come out of that window, the laughter of good pals who had made the best of a turn behind the lines before going up to the dirty places of death.

"Seems like a dream," said Bertrand Holt.

A young Frenchman was unloading some manure from a cart, and stared at us. He came a pace or two forward with a soldierly step, and said "Messieurs?" in a tone of inquiry.

"Is Madame Berthoult still here?" asked Bertrand in his good French.

The young man nodded, and swung round on his heel toward the house, with a shout of "Maman!"

"That must be Jean," said Holt. "The old lady was always talking about her *petit caporal*."

If this was her *petit caporal*—as indeed it was—he stood five feet ten or more, and was a tall, sturdy fellow, with a great chest revealed by his open shirt, and a handsome peasant face with blue eyes and bronzed skin

and a light moustache. I fancied him in the uniform of the Zouaves, or with a steel casque above that Norman-looking face.

A woman came out of the *estaminet*, and Holt went toward her, laughing, and said: "*Bonjour, madame.* Have you forgotten me, I wonder?"

She looked up into his face, and I saw her eyes light with remembrance.

"*Tiens! C'est le Capitaine Bertrand!*"

She put her arms about him and kissed him on both cheeks, laughing, and then weeping a little. I think the reappearance of this man whom she had known as an English officer brought back to her mind in a rush the years of agony and hope and fear, when she had worked and prayed for France and her son, before victory came; and then the contrast with a time when, after victory—as Holt and I were discovering—there came a sadness and disillusionment, because there seemed to France no fruits of victory but the remembrance of slaughtered youth and a heritage of debt and a sense of ruin.

I stood on one side a little as Holt talked to her, and noticed that her son watched them both rather moodily.

"Your friend was an English officer here?" he asked, turning to me.

"Yes, he was billeted here for several months, on and off, between the battles. I came here, too, once or twice."

He did not seem to get any pleasure out of that remark.

"Your men ruined the farm," he said gloomily. "We were glad when they went."

I did not like his way of speech, and answered rather sharply: "Our men helped to save France. Have you forgotten that?"

He twisted his fair moustache, and I saw that his brown, earth-stained hand had lost a middle finger.

"They helped to ruin France as well," he said. "Our victory, in which your men took their share, has left England powerful and rich. Is it not so? It has left France weak and dying."

He turned away from me, and with his double-pronged fork began unloading manure again.

Madame Berthoult called to him.

"Jean, come here, my son! This is the English officer about whom I have often spoken. *Le Capitaine Bertrand.*"

Holt walked over to the cart, smiling and touching his cap.

"I'm glad to see you home again. Your mother told me a thousand times of her *petit caporal*—how he helped to save Verdun! How he won the war!"

"Mothers talk like that," said the young Frenchman. "I did my duty, monsieur, and hated it."

"Like all of us," answered Holt.

He spoke amiably, though I saw that he was surprised by the rather hostile tone adopted by the son of Madame Berthoult.

"He gained the *médaille militaire*," said the woman, "and was three times cited before the army."

"My reward for three years in the shambles," said the young farmer; and I think there was a terrible bitterness in his words.

Holt turned the conversation away from the man who seemed to resent this personal interest.

"How is everybody in the village? I remember some pretty girls here in the old days. The two girls at the mill house, Rose and Madeleine, and your own little maid, Marthe—all the names come back to me now—and the blacksmith's daughter, Suzanne? All married, I expect, and some of them mothers of babes."

I saw a sad look cross the face of Madame Berthoult.

"The young men were mostly killed," she answered, "and the others came back with the *cafard*—moody. We have not had many weddings here."

Jean, her son, stabbed the heap of manure in his cart with his big-pronged fork and laughed gruffly:

"The English soldiers made love to all our girls. Then they went away and married their own girls. Ours were left the worse for war. That's one of our fruits of victory."

"Your girls were kind to our fellows," said Holt.

Jean Berthoult laughed again, but not pleasantly.

"Our men don't remember the English Tommies with the same love; nor the American Johnnies."

"In the château here," said Holt, "there was a young

lady, Mlle. Yvonne de Maresquel. She is not married yet ? "

Holt did not see, I think—but I saw—a quick glance between Madame Berthoult and her son. It seemed to me then that on the woman's side it was a frightened look. The young man, Jean, turned quickly to his farm cart. There was a moment's silence before the woman answered :

" No, she is not married. It is perhaps for the same reason. There are not many young men in this neighbourhood who would be suitable. Monsieur le Comte belongs to our old families, who shed their blood as easily as the peasants of France. Their young branches were lopped off in the war."

" Those who weren't *émbusqués* in the transport and administration," said Jean Berthoult bitterly. " I spat when I passed them in their polished boots behind the lines. Officers of liaison, interpreters, war-office clerks, *usqu'auboutistes*, fire-eaters who would sacrifice the last youth of France for the victory which would leave themselves with life."

" Jean has still a little of the *cafard*," said Madame Berthoult, smiling rather miserably. " He has brought it from the trenches, and it gives him fever now and then. So you will sleep in the same little room, *mon capitaine* ? "

" In the bed which has a picture of Papa Joffre above the curtains," said Holt.

" You are staying here ? " asked Jean Berthoult, and I thought there was no pleasure in his voice at this idea.

" A night or two," said Holt. " This village of yours belongs to my old life. For me it is crowded with ghosts."

" They're not good companions," replied the young man gruffly. " In any case, there is no comfort here. You would do better at Amiens."

" I want to pay my respects to the Comte de Maresquel," answered Holt. " I used to go shooting with him."

Again I saw Madame Berthoult give a rapid glance at her son—an uneasy, troubled glance, which he avoided.

" He is much broken by his son's death," she told us. He does not encourage many visitors."

"I think he'll be glad to see me," announced Holt in his careless way. "At least I want to renew my acquaintance with his daughter. She was very kind to me."

"There is some talk," said Madame Berthoult, "that Mademoiselle Yvonne will become a *religieuse* when her father dies. She is much devoted to the Convent of Notre Dame in Amiens."

She spoke these words with a kind of deliberate emphasis, in which I suspected some hidden motive. Was it a warning to Holt that he should not reawaken an old passion? I thought so at the time, though now I think her words had a different object.

"Oh, that would be a pity!" said Holt quickly. "She would waste herself like that."

I could see then by his sudden emotion that whatever his forgetfulness of Mademoiselle de Maresquel's Christian name, her image was more than a vague memory in his mind, and that he had some expectation of her which would not be patient of disappointment.

We had no more conversation in the courtyard, but went with Madame Berthoult to see our bedrooms—tiny, but clean enough, and with Papa Joffre's portrait above Holt's bedstead, just as he had said. And that afternoon, after a simple luncheon in the parlour downstairs, we went across the road and through the rusty iron gates, and up the avenue of beeches which led to the Château of Maresquel.

"It's my dream picture!" said Holt. "I dreamed of this place in Paris, and I swear I could smell the scent of the bluebells just as we smell them now. Look how they are all glinting in those beech glades!"

"The old man doesn't seem to have done much in the way of reconstruction since the war," I remarked in a more prosaic way. "This place is a wilderness."

"I like its overgrown look," answered Holt. "It's like the garden of the Sleeping Beauty. There used to be a golden oriole in that thicket. It sang sweeter than any nightingale."

He left the straight avenue for a path winding through the copse, and stood listening to the birds. There was no golden oriole singing, but many thrushes and tits,

which were hushed to silence now and then by the laughing cry of a jay.

"Yvonne and I," said Holt, "used to sit on an old stone bench here. Look, there it is—rather more moss-grown. I remember once I chaffed her about young Waterhouse, and she burst into tears. She was only a kid. Poor old Waterhouse! He fell in the last lap."

"Where does this path lead?" I asked. "We'd better keep to the avenue."

"It's all right," answered Holt. "There's a winding path which comes out at the château door. Then we come to a steep bank and a statue of the Madonna in a little grotto at the bend of the path. Lord, how it all comes back to me, after utter forgetfulness!"

We walked down the winding path over a carpet of bluebells and were near the statue of the Madonna, which gleamed white above a green bank, when Holt put his hand on my arm and stopped abruptly. I saw his reason. A girl was there, only a few yards away from us. She was kneeling on the grass in front of a stone bench, with her arms on the seat and her face drooped down over her arms. She was either praying or weeping. We knew she was weeping when, at some sound we made—the breaking of a twig under my foot, I think—she sprang up and turned toward us, her eyes wet with tears.

Holt was visibly embarrassed, and though he raised his hat, he did not utter a word. The girl stared at him in a frightened way, and I saw that she was a little lady with dark eyes and hair and a pretty, delicate face of a type one sees in old portraits which hang in the châteaux of France as we used to study them when they were the headquarters of our divisions and brigades. Then a look of recognition and surprise changed her expression, and a wave of colour swept over her face.

"It is Captain Holt," she said, speaking in French. "No, that is not possible!"

Holt found his gift of speech again.

"A thousand pardons for this intrusion, mademoiselle! I could not resist the pleasure of wandering through the little wood again before calling at the château."

H. presented me to the lady, and spoke her name rather formally: "Mlle. Yvonne de Maresquel."

She gave me her hand in a charming way, and said :

"*Enchantée, monsieur !*"

And then, not hiding those tears which still glistened on her eyelashes, wiped them away with a little lace handkerchief, and laughed as she did so.

"I did not expect strangers when you came. I was crying like a baby. Sometimes one is a little sad, *n'est-ce pas ?*"

"I have the *cafard* pretty often," said Holt. "It's a disease that has followed the war. In English we call it the hump."

"That is a funny name," said Mlle. Yvonne, laughing at its comical sound. "But in England you have not the same cause for the hump as we in France."

"About the same," answered Holt. "The war hit us pretty hard, and things are not the same—and never will be—in poor old England."

She gave him an unbelieving smile.

"England has recovered quickly. It is France that has gained nothing out of the war, and our wounds do not heal."

They were almost the same words that had been spoken by Jean Berthoult, the peasant farmer at the *estaminet* over the way. I thought it a queer coincidence at the time, though afterward I heard many people talk in the same way.

As we walked toward the château, one of those white-fronted old houses with steep roofs and dormer windows which seem to have been built all over France in the last phase of monarchy before the great revolution, I dropped behind Holt and only overheard a few words of their conversation. I caught one sentence spoken by Mlle, Yvonne :

"You did not answer my last letter !"

Holt murmured something which I did not hear.

"You went away like all the others," said the girl, "and did not remember our friendship. Why do you come back again ?"

There was a touch of bitterness in her reproach, and something like a challenge in that question.

Holt answered in a clear voice before he began to speak in a lower tone : "I've come back to ask for your

friendship again. I want it more than anything in the world."

Mademoiselle de Maresquel gave a queer little laugh, and I saw a warm colour creep up her white neck, which showed above a low lace collar.

"The English are great flirts, *n'est-ce pas, monsieur* ?"

I heard no more of what they said after that until we were in the *salon* of the château, when the girl asked us to wait while she went to find her father, who would be enchanted to see us, as she assured us politely.

The room in which we sat had a faded grandeur. The furniture was of the Louis XV period, with gilt chairs and mirrors and gilt-legged tables, but the chintz covers of the chairs were worn and frayed, and all the gilding was tarnished. The portraits on the walls belonged to the same period up to the days of Louis XVI, when the old Comtesse de Maresquel was dragged off to Arras and its greedy guillotine. Her face looked down on Holt and me, a brave old woman face smiling out of a lace head-dress; and among portraits of young officers and ladies of the French Court in wigs and ruffles and pompadour gowns there was one of a girl in a laced bodice, with a red rose at her breast, who reminded me instantly of Yvonne de Maresquel, who had but just left the room. Holt, who saw the direction of my eyes, nodded.

"Yes, rather like. The old family reproduces its type—and a good type, too."

"They have proud eyes, most of them," I said. "There's a look of arrogance on their faces."

"I like their pride," answered Holt. "They paid for it with their heads in the end, but I bet they knew how to die."

"That girl knew how to love, too, I expect," I said, pointing to the portrait. "A passionate little lady, by the look of her."

"It's better than English coldness," replied Holt; and I fancy he thought back for a moment to the girl he had engaged himself to before he discovered her owl-like stupidity.

The door of the little *salon* was opened by Mademoiselle de Maresquel, and she came in with her father, a tall old

man with a white moustache and pointed beard. He bowed to us stiffly, and then held out his hand to Holt.

"It is a pleasure to see you again, *mon capitaine*. We had given up hope of resuming acquaintance with the officers who in time of war received what poor hospitality we were able to offer them. They slept in our beds, quartered themselves in our *salons*, dined at our tables; and then, alas, departed."

The words were perfectly courteous; but in spite of the old man's smile and his grasp of Holt's hand, I suspected an underlying reproach in that speech, a charge of ingratitude against English soldiers. Perhaps we had been a little careless of French susceptibilities. Perhaps we had forgotten friendly favours too quickly. I am inclined to think that some of us made war an excuse for lack of courtesy. Indeed, that afternoon I had an idea of something more tragic than that, as far as French womanhood was involved in the ghastly drama of war, even if they were on the safe side of its red tide.

Holt asked, and I thought it was tactless of him, to see the album of portraits which Yvonne de Maresquel had painted in water-colours when his battalion was billeted about the château grounds. At first she refused with a laughing plea that they were badly painted; but when he pressed her she yielded, and unlocked a little cabinet and took out the book.

"My book of ghosts," she said. "I have not looked at them for more than a year."

When she looked at them now, as Holt sat close to her, I saw that old emotions stirred anew in her spirit. These good-looking boys whose faces she had sketched, a little weakly, but with some skill and charm, had come into her life and passed out of it. They had given her the homage of their eyes, paid her boyish compliments and little gallantries. They had been glad to touch her hands, to hear her laughter. Were they not exiles from their own womanhood, starved of love, travellers to dirty ditches from which all beauty was blasted, and all decency of life and all kind things? In their awkward English way they had flirted with this girl, perhaps stolen a kiss or two which she was glad to give. She had given

them her hero-worship because they were fighting for France, because they were a gallant crowd of youths, because she desired love, as most girls do. Then they had gone along the roads of war, sending back a picture postcard or two, a scribbled note, and afterwards—nothing more. I could guess all that, and the loneliness of the girl when the British Armies had gone from France. Not many French boys had come back to take the place of the English boys. More of them had fallen than of ours, yet even this album was a record of death.

"What has happened to Captain Halkett?" asked Yvonne de Maresquel. "He was a merry boy!"

"Oh, he was killed outside Cambrai," answered Holt.

"That is sad!"

She turned over the page with a sigh, and asked about another of these officers.

"And Lieutenant Arkwright?"

Holt groaned.

"It was bad luck for him. A splinter from an air bomb got him in his tent just before the Armistice."

"His mother must be very sad," said Mademoiselle Yvonne. "He used to tell me about his mother—like a little boy."

She turned another page, and Holt laughed in a melancholy way, and said, "Poor old Waterhouse!"

The girl looked up at him quickly, with troubled eyes.

"Please do not tell me that he was killed, too!"

"Outside of Maubeuge—on November ninth."

"I wondered why he did not write," said the girl; and in those words I read a confession that of all the men who had come to this château in Picardy for a little while between their battles, Waterhouse was the one who had established most intimate relations with this little lady of France. Holt must have thought so, too, because he coloured up and said something about Waterhouse having spoken of her many times in the weeks before he died.

"Alas!" said Mademoiselle Yvonne. "This is truly a book of ghosts! I dare not ask about the others."

She rose from her chair, leaving the book in Holt's hands, and I saw that her own hands trembled as she re-arranged some flowers in a vase on the table by the window.

"They were not all killed!" Holt told her, with an attempt at brightness, though I think he, too, was touched poignantly by the portraits of those dead boys. "See, here is Richardson! You remember his red hair? He's married now, with one babe. And here is Musgrave. He's in Constantinople. And Billy Cosgrove! Do you remember his sunny smile? He's a tremendous fellow, with a coalmine of his own and a seat in Parliament. He married a cousin of mine."

It was the old comte who spoke next. He had sat listening to the conversation of Holt and his daughter, with an occasional word to me; but now he turned to Holt with the offer of a cigarette which he had rolled in his fingers.

"Life is happy again in England," he said. "My friends tell me that the war has left but little trace in your country. Your losses were great, but not beyond endurance. It is our poor France that has been stricken almost past recovery. We have lost our noble young blood. Our girls are without suitors of their own class and rank. Our fields lack the labour of men. Our factories are without coal. Our capital is lost in the quagmire of Russian anarchy. France is bankrupt, monsieur, and it is England, profiting by the valour of our arms, which has extended her mighty empire, enriched her overseas trade and dominated the policy of the world."

Holt laughed and shook his head.

"Ever since I've come back to France, I've heard of nothing but the weath and power of England. We, too, are very poor, monsieur, apart from our profiteers, who gorged themselves fat on the pickings of war."

The Comte de Maresquel waved his cigarette with a gesture of unbelief.

"England is rich!" he reiterated. "She sells her coal to us at a great price. She has the genius of peace, whereas in France we have only the genius of war. We do not complain. We only see the simple truth. France won the war and England won the peace."

It was no use arguing with the old man. It was no use arguing, as Holt and I had already discovered, with any Frenchman's views of England's gains from war.

By good luck Mademoiselle Yvonne poured oil on the troubled waters of our visit by touching the old man's hand and speaking tactful words :

" These English gentlemen have not come for political discussions, father ; and, anyhow, we should be too proud to bemoan the price of all our sacrifices."

" That is true," said the old man. " We still have our pride, thank God. The Pride of France ! You will take a walk in my park, gentlemen ? "

So in a little while ended our first visit to the Château de Maresquel. But I knew that it would not be our last when Holt and I stayed talking in the parlour of the *estaminet* late that night.

" Look here, old man," he said abruptly, " I'm going to see this thing through."

" What thing ? " I asked, though indeed I guessed.

" This relighting of an old flame," he said. " You'll think I'm talking rot, and all that ; but something tells me that my fate is in this village. Something led me here, and directly I saw Yvonne again I knew the meaning of it. As soon as I can decently manage it I'm going to ask her to be my wife."

" That means," I told him, " that I've got to hang about this village while you are courting the girl. A pretty prospect ! "

" Oh, there's fishing ! " he said carelessly ; " and you're always happy talking French to the peasants and studying the simple life. Besides, my car can take you back to Paris any time you want to go."

" I'm not in a hurry," I told him. " But all the same I shouldn't set your mind too much on Mademoiselle de Maresquel. There's something I don't understand about her—some mystery. I fancy you've come back too late, my lad."

" Meaning that silly talk about a convent ? " asked Holt.

" That—or something else," I answered.

" If it's Fate that has brought me here," said Holt rather solemnly, " I'm backing it."

Even now I hardly knew what was in my mind when I spoke of some mystery about Yvonne de Maresquel. At that time I had no real evidence of any psychological

or matter-of-fact kind. That she was unhappy was clear enough, even if she had not betrayed herself by that weeping in the garden. But she had brightened up when Holt and I were with her, and had been very gracious in her invitation to us to dine at the château and use the park whenever we desired. I think some queer idea had become fixed in my mind because of the startled look between Madame Berthoult and her farmer son when Holt mentioned that girl's name. There had been a message between them, and fear was in it. What on earth were they scared about?

There was someone else in the village who seemed to have a queer sense of alarm at our presence in Maresquel, and in spite of most friendly intercourse with me made no secret that he desired our departure. That was the curé of the little white church above the château, Monsieur de Maratray. It was Yvonne de Maresquel who introduced me to him as Holt and I walked with her beyond the park. He was a middle-aged man, with a fine dignity and simplicity of manner. He had been a chaplain at Verdun, and had won the Croix de Guerre and many citations for gallant action in the face of the enemy. He greeted Yvonne de Maresquel with a sweep of his big *feutre*, and the hardness of his Breton face was wonderfully softened when he looked at her. I noticed that the girl seemed a little shy in his presence, and blushed deeply as she presented us to him.

"You are here in passing, *messieurs*?" he asked.

"We may stay a little while," said Holt, glancing at Mademoiselle Yvonne, who shirked his gaze, I thought. "After hard work, we like the peace of Picardy."

"There is better country elsewhere," said the curé. "There are few means of amusement for visitors in this poor village of ours."

It was a clear hint that he did not approve of our intention to stay in the neighbourhood, and perhaps, he was conscious of the shade of discourtesy in his words, for he softened them instantly by a more genial speech.

"If you are staying, it will give me great pleasure to receive a visit from you at my little house. Perhaps one of you play chess? It is a passion of mine."

"Of mine, too," I told him; and he said:

"Then we will have a combat. The Tricolour against the Union Jack, eh? and no offence to the *entente cordiale*."

He knew already that we were putting up at the *estaminet* of La Fleur des Champs, for he spoke of Madame Berthoult and her son.

"A brave woman, and enchanted by your visit, *messieurs*. Jean also is a noble young man. I saw his courage at Verdun. He was marvellous. What nerve, what contempt of death, what love of France! Our country owes a great debt to such a son as that. There is nothing we have that will ever pay back the price of our soldiers' sacrifice. Is it not so, mademoiselle?"

He turned to Yvonne de Maresquel with that smile which broke the hard lines of his handsome face, and she bowed a little and said:

"You are right, *mon père*. But there are many who forget."

It was on an evening when I played chess with Monsieur de Maratray—Holt was dining at the château—that this curé spoke more plainly of his wish for us to go from the village of Maresquel. After the game, in which the victory went to France—he played chess with skill and passion—he produced some formidable cigars and a bottle of Burgundy and sat talking in the twilight.

I remember now some of his words, and his political point of view. He had seen all there is of the horror of war, and it had burned into the man's soul, leaving a fire of hatred against Germany, which had caused all this evil; and yet, perhaps with an illogical reasoning, an even greater fury against the statesmen and politicians of Europe—French and English and Russian, as well as German and Austrian—who had made this war inevitable by a villainy of secret alliances, international rivalries and a challenge of armaments, by which the peoples of Europe had been betrayed into the madness of the great massacre.

"It was the people who were betrayed," he said many times. "These peasants whom I saw die after their agonies, to whose lips I held the cross of Christ, whose beautiful bodies I buried behind the lines, had no desire for war, but only hatred of it. They revolted against

its senseless abominations, monsieur; and though they were ready to die for France, they cursed the people behind the lines, the politicians in Paris, the profiteers at the back, the statesmen of the world, who were callous to their sufferings and incapable of restoring peace.

"What is that peace they have made after the sacrifice of our youth? Has it brought any reward to the people? Has it relieved them of their military burdens? Has it killed the menace of new wars? On the contrary, it has sowed the seeds which will be reaped again in the harvest of death. Yet already our manhood is spent. France victorious, is dying!"

The priest's hand shook as he lighted his cigar stump, which had gone out while he spoke.

"This war that has swept through France," he said, "with foreign soldiers in our villages and the enemy sprawled over our soil, has left us mortally damaged in blood and spirit, as well as in material ruin. That is the worst damage of all. Our broken-hearted women, our crippled men, who will never be the fathers of strong sons, the spread of disease, the sickness of our souls! War's heritage!"

He confessed himself a democrat of an extreme kind.

"France can only be saved by her peasant stock. At the top there is rottenness. The middle classes are utterly selfish. The peasant on the soil is the real hero of our war. From him must come our regeneration—if there is any chance of that."

He was silent for a time, and I did not know by what association of ideas he worked round to my friend Bertrand Holt and our stay in the village of Maresquel.

"You are moving away quite soon?" he asked.

When I smiled and said, "That depends on my friend Holt, who is well amused here," he looked distressed.

"Forgive me for speaking plainly," he said, after another silence, "but I think it right to say that I am anxious for you to leave our poor village as soon as possible. It is not a good place for your friend Captain Holt. It is——"

He hesitated for the right word, and found some difficulty in saying it.

"It is what?" I asked.

"It is a little dangerous for him, and perhaps for others."

I was startled by those words, by the tone in which he spoke them, by his obvious distress.

"Dangerous!" I exclaimed. "In what way, *Monsieur le Curé*?"

With a shaky hand he poured me out another glass of Burgundy before answering my question.

"I cannot speak more plainly. You will forgive me, I trust, for seeming so blunt in speech, and yet so enigmatic. I am a priest and you are a man of the world. Perhaps you will accept my warning as a friendly hint with a serious and spiritual motive. If you have any influence with your friend Captain Holt, I beg of you, in my position as a priest, to take him away from Maresquel without delay."

He would not say more than that, and indeed I could not press him, as he begged me not to ask for further explanation.

We talked a little of other things, played over the end of a game of chess, and then went out to the gate of his little house, where I said good night to him. As I walked round the old grey wall of the park I tried to think out some theory which would explain the curé's warning. Obviously it was something to do with Holt's courtship of Yvonne de Maresquel. Was she pledged to the church as a future nun, and was this priest afraid that Holt would tempt her from that vocation? Somehow I did not think so, though the idea was plausible. Holt himself was in danger, he said. Danger from whom? What kind of danger?

At the park gates I turned to look up the avenue toward the château, and saw lights from its windows twinkling through the trees. It was a moonlight night, and the broad road of the avenue was all white between the black shadows and the light, and I recognised Holt at once by a limp he had from an old wound, and Yvonne de Maresquel by the slightness of her form. As they came near the gates Holt was talking in a low voice, and he was answered by a light and merry laugh. He stopped and took the girl's hand and put it up to his lips,

and she laughed again, and drew her hand away and tapped him on the arm. Then they walked nearer to the gates, and Yvonne de Maresquel undid the chain that fastened them.

"*Au revoir,*" she said. "*Jusqu'à demain, alors?*"

"*Au revoir,*" said Holt.

He quoted an old French chanson about the sadness of parting:

> "Partir, c'est mourir un peu;
> C'est mourrir à ce qu'on aime."

He tried to take her hand again, but she turned and sped back to the château.

I saw all that clearly in the moonlight. Less clearly I saw another human form not far from us, also watching this scene at the iron gates. At first I thought it was a shadow close to the grey wall cast by an overhanging tree, but suddenly I saw it move, and I was certain that a man stood there, looking across the low wall, well concealed unless my eyes had searched him out.

Holt came striding along, and I went to meet him as he crossed the road to our *estaminet.*

"Hello!" he said. "The old comte wants us to dine with him on Wednesday. He's getting very civil."

"I'm not sure about Wednesday," I told him. "I'm thinking we had better make a move from this place. We've stayed here long enough, and I'm getting hipped."

"You can go, old man," was Holt's reply. "I'm staying."

I said nothing to him about Monsieur de Maratray's warning. It was later, before we went to bed, and he sat in my room while I undressed and smoked a last cigarette, that I told him of my strange conversation in the curé's house. Holt was not impressed.

"Probably wants to push the girl into a convent," was his comment. "I hope to see about that!"

"What is his hint of danger to you?"

"Fantastic nonsense," said Holt.

He gave me a cheery good night and went to his own room. I tumbled into bed, but could not sleep. Downstairs in the parlour Madame Berthoult was talking with her son. Through the thin flooring their voices came

up to my room in what seemed an endless dialogue, the woman's pleading at times, I thought, the son's surly at first, and then passionate and harsh—harsh, until it suddenly seemed to break, and there was the noise of a man sobbing and of a woman soothing him like a child. That was a little after the church clock chimed the hour of two. Then downstairs heavy footsteps went across the parlour, stumbled up the wooden staircase and were silenced behind a slammed door.

Holt went riding with Yvonne de Maresquel next day, and on two good horses from the old comte's dilapidated stables they looked a pretty pair, as I had to admit when I stood aside in the lane to let them pass, while the girl leaned down over her saddle with a gracious "*Bonjour, monsieur!*" They had to rein up as a heavy cart came out of a field track and crossed the road. The old farm horse was being led by Jean Berthoult, and as he saw Mademoiselle de Maresquel and Holt his bronzed face flushed to a deep red with peasant shyness.

"*Bonjour Jean,*" said the girl in that gracious way she had with everyone.

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle.*"

He took off his broad straw hat and stood bareheaded while he pulled his old horse on one side to let the others pass. I was struck with the sturdy figure of the man, and his grave, handsome peasant's face. One of the heroes of Verdun! One of those French peasants from whom the curé of Maresquel expected the regeneration of France—"if there were any chance of that." Last night I had heard him sobbing like a hurt child. What was the cause of his hurt? Some wound of the soul that war had left unhealed? He stood looking after Holt and the girl, and then led his horse and cart into the field.

Holt seemed happy in this love affair, confident of its good ending; and on Wednesday evening, when I dined at the château, having given up the attempt to make Holt leave the village, I was bound to confess to myself that he had some reason for his optimism. Mademoiselle Yvonne seemed glad of his company, and though in her French way she laughed at his sentimental speeches and challenged him to a duel of wit in which he was

badly beaten by her irony and lightness of world-play, her heightened colour and bright eyes showed that she was not displeased by his efforts to please her. More than before she looked like that portrait of the lady over the oval mirror in the *salon*, and that touch of colour in her pale cheeks gave her a new beauty. The Comte de Maresquel seemed to have shaken off some of his melancholy, and was, I noticed, immensely gracious to Holt.

Once while his daughter was singing and Holt was standing near the piano he touched me on the hand and smiled and said : " Youth ! How beautiful ! In spite of all the slaughter, there is still youth in the world. God be praised ! "

The old man's eyes watered, and I guessed he was thinking of his dead son, one of the victims of Verdun.

Presently he spoke again, while his daughter played the opening bars of an old chanson which once I had heard sung by a young French officer in a dug-out below Notre Dame de Lorette. It was the song of " *Tout doux ! Tout doux !* "

" Few young men come to this château," said the Comte de Maresquel. " My daughter has been very lonely, poor child ! "

He asked me a little about Holt's business and prospects in life, and I could see that the old man's mind was already thinking of the *dot* and the marriage bells.

Even his prejudice against England, and his belief in her greedy grabbings after war, became moderated owing to the graciousness of his courtesy to Holt and to me as Holt's friend.

That night as we walked back Holt sang to himself the songs of Yvonne, and there was a quiet happiness in his eyes, as I saw by candlelight in his little room.

" How long are you staying here ? " I asked, smiling at him ; and he said, " Give me another week, old man."

Before the week was out I had discovered the reason why the curé did not wish us to live in the village, and the danger that threatened Holt.

It was, indeed, the next day that I found out part of this, before hearing the rest. Holt was out walking by himself before our *déjeuner*, and I had wandered

through an open gate into the park of the château, and was lying under a sheltered bank by the river that runs through the grounds reading Froissart's Chronicles. Close to me was a small copse of willow trees, and when I had been reading half an hour or so I heard voices there. I knew them both. One voice was that of Yvonne de Maresquel and the other was that of Jean Berthoult.

"You are, then, jealous of me?" said Mademoiselle Yvonne.

"Yes, I am jealous," answered the young man.

He spoke those words quietly, but suddenly he raised his voice and spoke harshly and painfully:

"Have I not a right to be jealous? Every day you go with this Englishman, ride with him, walk with him, laugh with him. He dines with your father while I prowl outside your windows. He is received as a lover, and you forget my love."

There was a moment's silence, and then Mademoiselle de Maresquel spoke with as much passion as this peasant:

"I do not forget my love or yours. Have we not pledged ourselves before God? Have you then no faith in my passion, in my soul and in my sacrifice?"

I heard the leaves rustle as though the man had thrust the bough of a tree aside.

"You speak of sacrifice!" he said bitterly. "I see now that I ask too much of you. Not even after the Great War is there equality between a man who fought for France and a woman of the old caste. You look down on me as a peasant, and though your kisses are warm on my lips, on fire in my soul, you are happy when this Englishman comes—this *sacré* Englishman—and play with him, coquette with him, because he is not a peasant, but one of your own rank, above the people. How do I know that his lips have not tasted your kisses, too? I saw him yesterday holding your hand, behaving as a lover to his mistress."

"That is an insult," said Mademoiselle de Maresquel. "I will not speak to you while you are mad like this. I have given you a thousand proofs of love."

"I want a thousand more," said the man.

That was all I heard, it was too much. Yvonne

de Maresquel went alone through the copse, and two minutes later I saw her pass into the château by a side door. Jean Berthoult stayed a while hidden in the trees, and then walked down the winding path below me, like a soldier on his way to a front-line trench.

Holt came in to *déjeuner*, and I dared not tell him what I had heard. I had no right to know. I only urged him to come back to Paris that very day, and some look in my eyes, the tone of my voice startled him.

"You're ill!" he said. "Your nerves are all rotten, old man. You want a long spell of rest, and this place is as good as any other. Get out your fishing-rod, and let the peace of this place sink into your soul."

That afternoon he went fishing alone, and I promised to follow him up the banks of the Canche to where a little wooden bridge crosses above the church. I found him there at three in the afternoon, but he was not fishing. He was lying among some rushes, bleeding from a bullet wound in his side, and so near death that I thought he was dead.

I bent over him saying "My God! My God!" in a foolish, frightened way. He became conscious a little later and spoke to me in a kind of whisper.

"Some sniper got me," he said.

He groaned painfully, and then became horribly still and silent, and his face was as grey as mud.

I managed to get him to the Fleur des Champs in a farm cart—not that one which had been led by Jean Berthoult, but another that passed, by the grace of God.

Madame Berthoult wrung her hands like a woman demented, at the sight of him, saying, "*Oh, mon Dieu! Oh, mon Dieu!*" in an agony of grief.

I think she knew quite well even then whose finger had pulled the trigger of that gun which had laid my poor friend low. But she showed courage, too, and it was with her help that I carried poor Holt upstairs and laid him on his bed. I remember driving like a madman to Amiens in Holt's car and bringing back a surgeon, after a nightmare search for him, because he had left the hospital on a private visit. I helped him in his operation when he extracted the bullet from Holt's body, fetched hot water, towels, basins. But I have

only a vague remembrance of all that which I did in a kind of dream. What I remember poignantly is my first question, which I asked on the narrow stairs outside Holt's room, and the answer he gave me with a little smile.

"What do you think of him?"

"He ought to live, monsieur. He has youth on his side. And someone is very lucky—the man who failed to kill him."

The news of this outrage on the English visitor spread quickly through the village and up the avenue to the château. A little group of peasants gathered outside the *estaminet,* talking excitedly, and through these the curé pushed his way, the men doffing their caps to him. Madame Berthoult met him on the threshold of her little inn and burst into tears again at the sight of him. His face was very white and he spoke sternly.

"Where is Jean?"

"He is not yet come home, *mon père.* He is still working in the fields."

She lied bravely for the sake of her son.

The priest raised his hat to me and took me on one side.

"Is there any place where we may talk alone? In your bedchamber upstairs?"

I led him to my room, and we tiptoed past Holt's door. In my bedroom the priest laid his hat on a chair and spoke nervously:

"This is a terrible affair, monsieur. I feared that some such thing might happen. You remember my warning?"

I was angry with him, and answered him without courtesy or restraint:

"Your warning was useless. You did not tell me that you had a wild beast in the village. You said nothing about the guilty passion of Mademoiselle de Maresquel for that murderous peasant."

He raised his hand with a gesture of reproof.

"No wild beast," he answered gently. "No guilty passion. Only the natural love between a young man and a young woman, and that blind madness of jealousy which tempts men to evil deeds when they fear a rival."

"Do not talk any more in riddles," I said with some violence. "What is the real relationship between this Jean Berthoult and Mademoiselle de Maresquel? What part are you playing in this sordid drama?"

"My son," he said, "remember you are talking to an older man and to a priest of God. If you will hear me out I will tell you what part I have played in this affair, of which I see you already guess a great deal."

I remember now the eloquence of the man, his emotion, his plea for charity. He told me of Jean Berthoult, whom he loved like a son. He had known him as a boy before the war—high-spirited, passionate, a devoted son, a good lad. In the war he had done heroic service for France, but after the Armistice he had come home moody, restless and prone to spells of deepest melancholy.

"The agony of war," said the curé, "had ploughed furrows in the lad's soul."

Then suddenly he had become radiantly happy. Some magic seemed to have touched him. Even the villagers remarked that the *petit caporal* had found his gaiety again.

"He is forgetting war," they said.

But the priest, with more knowledge of human nature, suspected another cause.

"The poor boy has found his heart's mate," he said.

He wondered what girl in the village had gained this great prize, but there seemed no maid with whom Jean Berthoult kept company. Then one day he met Yvonne de Maresquel with this boy in a hayfield. They were holding hands as they sat side by side under the hedge, and in a glance the curé knew why Jean Berthoult had a radiant light in his eyes. They started up when they saw him, and stood before him like children discovered in the enjoyment of stolen fruits.

It was Mademoiselle de Maresquel who confessed their love.

"What does it matter," she cried, "that Jean lives in an *estaminet* and I at a tumble-down château? We are all equal in rank after the war if we did equal service for France; and Jean is the best man for miles round, and the one I love."

"At those words," said the priest, "I confess that my heart gave a leap of joy. As you know, I am a democrat,

and love the youth of France so much that I am sad when I see single maids with no chance of marriage and brave lads like Jean without a mate. Why should not Mademoiselle Yvonne marry this splendid boy and be the mother of children worthy of France? 'My little ones,' I said, 'I do not blame you. I will give my blessing to all innocent and pure love.' So they wept and kissed my hands. Yet Mademoiselle Yvonne pledged me to secrecy, 'for if my father knows,' she said, 'he will die. You know his pride.'

"Yes, I knew the pride of that old man, and I was afraid of it. I feared his wrath if he should know this pledge between his daughter and a peasant of France. In that I behaved foolishly, with cowardice, for the sake of these two children, whom I loved. From that all else followed, and I am almost as guilty of what has happened to your poor friend as Jean Berthoult, whose jealous rage has caused this dreadful act. I connived at their meetings and kept them secret from Monsieur le Comte. I was as jealous as Jean himself of any lover who might come courting this dear lady of the château, lest the old bonds of caste might tempt her away from her heart's allegiance to her peasant mate.

"I knew Jean's passion, his quick rebellious temper, and that jealous rage which is in the heart of every peasant—of all youth, I think—when love is at fever heat. It was for that reason I was suspicious of your friend. 'He seeks to reawaken an old amour,' I thought. 'He is elegant and charming, with fine white hands unstained by work on the soil. Mademoiselle Yvonne will be excited at meeting an English gentleman again. That is natural. And if Jean finds his love is being stolen he will do some rash and terrible act.''

"You see, monsieur, I hide nothing from you, neither my own weakness nor the secret of this poor boy and girl who now are caught in the devil's trap and who must pay with broken hearts for what has happened."

For some time I was silent, thinking over the priest's words. Then I raised my eyes to his, and was touched by the deep anguish of his face.

"I understand," I said, "and I am very sorry."

He grasped my hand and held it close to his heart.

"Let us rely on God's mercy. He will not be harder than we are upon the wickedness of human nature and the frailties of youth, knowing our great temptations."

He went into Holt's bedroom, and stayed there for a long time. When he came out again there was a look of relief upon his face.

"His pain has left him, and he is out of danger, I think."

These words he spoke aloud. Then he grasped my arm and whispered to me: "I have told him everything. He forgives Jean with a most truly Christian heart. He is indeed a chivalrous young man."

I was astounded that Holt should be well enough to listen to such a tale, for when I had seen him last he was unconscious; but now, going into his room, I found him clear-headed and fairly comfortable. The extraction of the bullet and the stanching of his wound had left him easy.

"Hello, old man!" he said in a weak voice.

I held his hand, which lay on the coverlet and pressed it.

"I shall have to stay a bit longer in this village," he said, with something like his old smile; "and I've made a pretty mess of things."

He stayed three weeks longer in the village before he was well enough to travel to Paris in his motor-car, and every day of that time Mademoiselle de Maresquel came to see him, with flowers and fruits; and another of his visitors was Jean Berthoult, who sat for hours at his bedside, with silent devotion.

On the night of the day when I had found Holt lying in the rushes Jean had come home drunk and wild-eyed and weeping. He desired to give himself up to the police, but Madame Berthoult and I kept him locked up downstairs. It was next morning that he went in to see Holt, and what happened then I do not know, but only heard the murmur of voices for what seemed to me an hour. When Jean came out of the room he was white and trembling, but like a man who has been through some spiritual ordeal and found comfort.

"A good fellow!" was all Holt's comment on that conversation. "A splendid chap! Brave as a lion and simple as a child."

It was then that Mademoiselle Yvonne came in, and I saw her meet Jean Berthoult on the stairs. He flattened himself against the wall to let her pass, and lowered his head, while a wave of colour reddened his face.

Yvonne de Maresquel was as white as he had been, and I thought she would pass him without a word; but suddenly she put her hands on his broad shoulders and laid her face against his breast and wept bitterly. He put his arms about her and kissed her on the forehead, and his face was all wet with her tears. Then she went up into Holt's room, and presently Holt sent Madame Berthoult to fetch her son, and all of them stayed together in the room, while I smoked many cigarettes alone in mine.

The Comte de Maresquel knew nothing of the real truth behind this strange affair.

"Some *sacré* anarchist!" he always said when searching for a theory as to the wounding of Holt. "One of those Bolshevik devils with whom France is infested, like all other countries of our stricken Europe."

I think he was deeply pained when Holt went away with me without making an offer for his daughter's hand, and it is possible that this disappointment, and the melancholy state of France, which preyed on the old man's mind, caused him to release his hold on life. It was only a month ago that I heard of his death, and only a week ago that I received a letter from Monsieur de Maratray telling me that Mademoiselle Yvonne de Maresquel had been married quietly to Jean Berthoult in the private chapel of the château, and that he had asked God to bless this union between a gracious young lady and a gallant son of France.

He added a postscript in which he sent his compliments to le Capitaine Holt, "most chivalrous of English gentlemen."

Some day I shall go back, I think, and see how that marriage has worked out in France. A hazardous adventure, I imagine.

THE END

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